The Channels of English Literature

THE ENGLISH ESSAY AND ESSAYISTS

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BY

HUGH WALKER, M.A., LL.D.

PREFACE

It is hoped that in most respects this volume on *The English Essay and Essayists* will sufficiently explain itself without the aid of a preface. But there is one point with regard to which a word of explanation may perhaps be necessary. There is in English a great mass of literary criticism, of which much the greater part is in the form of essays. If these critical essays had been here treated in accordance with their intrinsic importance, they would have filled much more space than has been given to them. But in *The Channels of English Literature* there is a separate volume assigned to criticism. In the present volume, therefore, my purpose has been to touch upon the subject as lightly as the nature of my own task permitted. I could not entirely ignore it; for sometimes criticism has aided in the development of the essay, and sometimes reference to an essayist's critical work has been necessary to round off a general estimate of him. It is clear, for example, that Matthew Arnold could not be ignored in a book professing to discuss the English Essayists; and it is equally clear that to speak of him as an essayist without reference to his criticism would be absurd. No attempt, however, has been made to discuss his critical principles in full. This, then, is the explanation if I seem to have said too little about the critics. If I have said too much, it is from failure to strike the just mean between full discussion and total silence.

HUGH WALKER.

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composition. Usage, however, overleaps even the boundary between prose and verse; and not only do we find in the eighteenth century a metrical *Essay on Criticism*, but even in the nineteenth we find a metrical *Essay on Mind*. Indeed the word is actually older in English as the name of a composition in verse than as the name of a composition in prose; for King James's *Essays of a Prentice in the divine Art of Poesie* preceded Bacon's *Essays*.

While, therefore, we know fairly well what to expect of a poem called a lyric, and even of one called an epic or a tragedy, we have hardly the vaguest idea of what we shall find in a composition entitled an essay. This extreme indefiniteness is partly inherent in the nature of the thing: etymologically, the word essay indicates something tentative, so that there is a justification for the conception of incompleteness and want of system. But partly also it is factitious: sometimes the modesty of an author, and sometimes his fear of criticism, have led to the adoption of the vague name instead of one which, if it was more precise, might also seem more pretentious. And the vagueness became more vague by the operation of a kind of natural law; for just as, in the days before enclosures, stray cattle found their way to the unfenced common, so the strays of literature have tended towards the ill-defined plot of the essay.

A term so elastic means little or nothing, just because it means anything. If we call Locke's great work and Lamb's dissertation on roast pig alike essays, we have in effect emptied the word of content. Apparently there is no subject, from the stars to the dust-heap and from the amœba to man, which may not be dealt with in an essay. Neither in respect of manner of treatment is the range much less wide. Frequently the essay derives its charm from lightness and from superficiality, apparent if not real. It is the literary form of the pococurante: if Gallio ever wrote about religion, he gave

expression to the indifference of his soul in essays. But on the other hand, along with light, airy, graceful trifles, we find pieces of lyrical intensity, passionate outbursts, suggestions of deeps unfathomed by even Shakespeare's plummet. We may anticipate that it will prove to be impossible to state with precision the marks and attributes of a thing so various that it seems to be the epitome of all literature: the failure of the lexicographers is significant.

In the last resort we may reduce essays to two classes—essays *par excellence*, and compositions to which custom has assigned the same name, but which agree only in being comparatively short (for it is necessary to rule out the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*) and in being more or less incomplete. This incompleteness may arise either from treating a subject only in outline, or from handling only a branch or division of some greater theme. The theme itself may be in any department of human thought; it may be scientific or philosophic, historical or critical. Such essays do not strictly belong to a separate literary form; the historical essay is an incomplete history, the philosophical essay might expand into a treatise. But besides essays in this looser sense there are essays more strictly so called in which we do detect a special literary form. Lamb's essays are the best examples in English, as Montaigne's are in French. Such essays could under no circumstances expand into treatises; they are complete in themselves. They have been admirably described by Alexander Smith in his paper *On the Writing of Essays*—itself one of the best essays on the art ever written: "The essay," he says, "as a literary form, resembles the lyric, in so far as it is moulded by some central mood—whimsical, serious, or satirical. Give the mood, and the essay, from the first sentence to the last, grows around it as the cocoon grows around the silkworm." "The essayist," he says further, "does not usually appear early in the literary history of a

country; he comes naturally after the poet and the chronicler. His habit of mind is leisurely; he does not write from any special stress of passionate impulse; he does not create material so much as he comments upon material already existing. It is essential for him that books should have been written, and that they should, at least to some extent, have been read and digested. He is usually full of allusions and references, and these his reader must be able to understand and follow."

Custom cannot be ignored, and in the following chapters some attention will be paid to the essay and essayist in the looser sense, but at the same time greater stress will be laid upon those compositions and those authors who illustrate the stricter meaning. The essayists of the centre, as they may be called, have the superior claim upon attention in a book devoted to the essay.

CHAPTER I

ANTICIPATIONS OF THE ESSAY

While there is doubt as to the precise definition of an essay, it is possible to say with unusual precision when the name (as used to denote a certain species of prose composition) and the thing alike were introduced into England. Notwithstanding the anonymous and somewhat trivial *Remedies against Discontentment* (1596), it may reasonably be said that we owe both to Bacon, and that 1597, when he published the little book containing ten pieces of the most concentrated literary pemmican ever presented, is the birth-year of the English essay. But it is Bacon himself who remarks that "there are certain hollow blasts of wind and secret swellings of seas before a tempest;" and so too there are certain anticipations of the essay before it can be said without reservation that we had essays.

The age of Elizabeth was a time of literary experiment. Though the drama became almost an obsession, and drew to itself many men whom nature never meant to be dramatists, that did not prevent the most varied experiments in poetic forms new and old; nor did the fact that the age was essentially poetic prevent ventures in prose. But between the experiments in verse and the experiments in prose there was a great difference. In verse there was a tradition which, though not very firmly established, was valuable for guidance; in prose, notwithstanding Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* and Robinson's translation of *Utopia* and Berners's *Froissart*, there was none. Further, the very nature of verse implies law, and the form proclaims it; while the first tendency is to regard prose as free from law. Most men, in the earlier stages of literary

development at least, and probably in the later stages as well, do not "discover" that they have been talking prose all their lives, but assume it. Now the vice of Elizabethan poetry is lawlessness; much more therefore is this likely to prove to be the vice of Elizabethan prose. Here literary rubbish was shot; and though in the heap there are gems to be found, they are invariably rough. Nowhere else is a discriminating judgment so imperatively demanded. For the last century the tendency of criticism, though there are honourable exceptions, has been towards a most uncritical laudation of everything Elizabethan. It is easy to praise even the poetry amiss, and with regard to the prose it is still more easy to forget or to ignore the fact that, till near the end of the reign of Elizabeth, there is, of original prose, little indeed that can be commended without reserve. There is a freshness, a lavishness of thought and imagination, about the prose as well as the poetry of the great age that is apt to carry the student away. Its very rudeness is not without charm. But we must remember that a composition may be forcible and ingenious, and may prove conclusively that the author's mind is powerful and fertile, yet at the same time may give evidence that he is capricious and lawless, and by reason of his very lawlessness is not the master of the instrument of expression which he uses. For art, like nature, is not mastered except by obedience. In this predicament the great bulk of Elizabethan prose stands. It is inartistic because the writers are wilful; there are many purple patches, but very few compositions which are good as wholes.

The prose works of Lodge and Lyly and Greene are relevant to the history of the novel rather than to that of the essay. The beginnings of the latter we may trace along three different lines: the line which leads to the character-writers of the seventeenth century, the line of criticism, and the line of polemics. The last is a thing hostile to the literary spirit,

and though it demands some notice when we are dealing with origins, at later stages it will as a rule be ignored.

The English character-writers are all disciples, more or less close, of Theophrastus, and it has been customary to explain the popularity of their art in the early part of the seventeenth century by reference to Casaubon's translation of Theophrastus, which was published in 1592. Certainly that translation gave a great stimulus to the school, and it may be that, but for it, Hall and Overbury and Earle would never have written their 'characters.' But the conception of 'charactery' as an art was already rooted in England. The remains we possess are, it is true, somewhat trumpery. To a printer named John Awdeley we owe the *Fraternity of Vagabonds*. Its precise date has not been determined, but it is known to be slightly older than Thomas Harman's *Caveat or Warning for Common Cursetors, vulgarly called Vagabonds*, which seems to have appeared in 1566. Awdeley's booklet is little more than a curiosity. It is mainly a collection of definitions of the various classes of the tribe of vagabonds, with two or three short essays on "the company of cozeners and shifters." Harman is more ambitious, and his *Caveat* may be described as a short dissertation or treatise on vagabonds, each kind or class being the subject of what may be regarded indifferently as a chapter or a separate essay. His sketches have considerable merit, for he possessed humour and sympathy as well as knowledge. But Mr. G. S. Gordon has shown [1] that charactery was already far more firmly rooted in English than we should infer from such slight remains as these. The passage he quotes from Wilson's *Art of Rhetoric* proves that the writing of character-sketches after the manner of Theophrastus was a regular part of mediæval education. The germ was not only alive, but was widely diffused; and the wonder is, not that the art of writing char-

[1] In *English Literature and the Classics*.

acters became popular in the reign of James, but that it was not already popular under his predecessor. The explanation, no doubt, lay in the fact that the necessary instrument was not yet forged. More even than other artists in prose, the character-writer needs a style concise, pointed and lucid; and nobody knew the secret till Shakespeare and Bacon taught it. If Casaubon's *Theophrastus* was a useful reminder, Bacon's *Essays* were a revelation.

Criticism had made a feeble beginning before the Elizabethan age, and Caxton's prefaces may be regarded as early essays in the art. In later days, critical writings became both more voluminous and of greater intrinsic importance than those scanty anticipations of the school of Theophrastus which have been mentioned; and though Wilson's *Art of Rhetoric* is, because of its length and elaboration, above the sphere of the essay, and Gascoigne's *Notes of Instruction concerning the making of Verse* is, for reasons suggested by the title, beneath it, the bulk of this critical work consists of essays. Much of it relates to the controversy about metres, classical and non-classical, the chief interest of which now is that at one time it threatened to lead Spenser himself astray. Campion attacks rhyme and Daniel defends it; but, though the latter proves himself much the better man, he, as well as his adversary, is essentially technical. It is only in the attack on poetry as an art and the defence of it that we meet with work which is still deserving of praise as literature, and that only from the pen of Sidney.

The first document in this controversy is Stephen Gosson's (1554–1624) *School of Abuse* (1579), which he dedicated, without authority, to Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586), and so, probably, provoked the celebrated *Apology for Poetry*. Gosson's attack is written with considerable vigour and spirit but has little substance, and is violent and one-sided. His dislike of poets is great: "He that goes to sea, must smell of the

ship; and that sails into poets will savour of pitch." Afterwards he became aware that he had gone too far, and in an "apology" for the original attack, which was published in the same year, he represented himself as an enemy only of the abuses of poetry and the kindred arts. This partial disclaimer, however, cannot be reconciled with the violence of *The School of Abuse*—a violence all the more remarkable because Gosson, who was still no more than twenty-five, was already an actor and a writer both in tragedy and in comedy. His conversion must have been sudden, and possibly there may have been a personal motive behind it.

The poets could not afford to leave Gosson unanswered, for not only did he write with vigour, but he represented, whether sincerely or not, a phase of opinion which had to be reckoned with. The Puritan sentiment of the London magistrates had already driven the players outside the bounds of the city. Thomas Lodge (1558?–1625) undertook the task of refutation in a pamphlet which is critically worthless. He is as abusive as Gosson and less skilful. It seems possible that Gosson, like Jeremy Collier long afterwards, might have carried off the honours but for the mistake he had committed in the unauthorised dedication to Sidney. Gosson must have conceived himself to have reason for believing that Sidney would sympathise with the Puritan view expressed in *The School of Abuse;* but the *Apology for Poetry*, which was written about four years after the appearance of Gosson's essay, though not published till 1595, proved that he was wrong. This is the only really good product of the controversy, the only critical piece of the sixteenth century which may still be read with pleasure by that vague personage, 'the general reader.' But the general reader will certainly not do justice to its author. Judgment must be relative to time and circumstance, and justice can be done to Sidney only by those who compare him with others who have attempted similar tasks.

The distance between him and them is almost immeasurable. It is moral as well as intellectual, a matter of the spirit as well as of the pen. There is in the *Apology* no sentence unworthy of that description of the author which appeared upon the title-page when he was in his grave—"the right noble, virtuous and learned Sir Philip Sidney, Knight." Sidney will not stoop to the abuse in which Gosson and Lodge alike revel. Though it is fairly clear that the *Apology* is an answer to *The School of Abuse*, no mention is ever made of the latter. Though an apology, it is written in a strain of eulogy so lofty as to show that Sidney believed poetry to need hardly more 'apology' than, in the opinion of George III., did the Bible itself. The most effective defence is to carry the war into the enemy's territory. And this is the spirit in which Sidney writes about poetry. Far from pleading that it is excusable, Sidney asserts its pre-eminence. It is superior alike to philosophy and to history. In respect of the true end of all knowledge, it is superior to every one of the sciences.

In his judgments on special subjects Sidney is often happy. The famous sentence about "the old song of Percy and Douglas" indicates a mind alert and receptive, and so do the remarks on recent English poems. On the other hand, the condemnation of the neglect of the unities in the English drama, and of the intermixture of tragedy with comedy, shows that Sidney had no more of the prophetic faculty than other critics. Within a few years from the time when he wrote, Shakespeare had proved that on both points he was wrong. But if we condemn Sidney, what is to be said of Ben Jonson and others who maintained the same doctrine even after the demonstration of its falsity?

The *Apology for Poetry* is written with fervour and strength, and is often felicitously expressed, but the style is uncertain and unformed. Parentheses are too frequent, and relative clauses hang one upon another. Such a period as

[illegible] would never have [illegible] prose style:— [illegible] ut cause cried out against), observing rules neither of honest civility nor of skilful poetry, excepting *Gorboduc* (again, I say, of those that I have seen), which notwithstanding, as it is full of stately speeches and well-sounding phrases, climbing to the height of Seneca his style, and as full of notable morality, which it doth most delightfully teach, and so obtain the very end of poesy, yet in truth it is very defectious in the circumstances, which grieveth me, because it might not remain as an exact model of all tragedies."

The other critics may be passed over rapidly. Neither Webbe nor Puttenham is worthy of note as an essayist. The latter's *Art of English Poesy* has the size and elaboration of a treatise rather than the comparative informality of an essay. Sir John Harington (1561–1612), in the *Brief Apology for Poetry* prefixed to his translation of *Orlando Furioso*, shows himself to be a follower of Sidney. He has that reverence for authority which is common to all the critics of the time. He has a reverence also for worldly station, and remarks, with bated breath, that Cornelius Agrippa has not only condemned poetry, but "hath spared neither mitres nor sceptres." George Chapman has some interesting matter in the prefaces to his translation of Homer, but he as well as Sidney affords excellent illustrations of the vicious prose style of the time, and in one of these gives a noteworthy hint of the reason why it is so bad:—

"I ever imagine that as Italian and French poems to our studious linguists win much of their discountryed affection, as well because the understanding of foreign tongues is sweet to their apprehension as that the matter and invention is pleasing, so my far-fetched and, as it were, beyond sea manner of writing, if they would take as much pains for their poor

countrymen as for a proud stranger when they once understood it, should be much more gracious to their proud conceits than a discourse that falls naked before them, and hath nothing but what mixeth itself with ordinary table talk." The prospect of English prose was poor so long as it should strive to be far-fetched and to cultivate a "beyond sea manner of writing"; and among the proofs of the greatness of Shakespeare and Bacon is the fact that they both knew how to be homely on the proper occasion, as well as how to be eloquent in a cis-marine manner.

The controversialists of the period under review were related with unusual intimacy to the critics, for, as we have seen, the critics were themselves controversialists. It was Puritanism that attacked poetry, and so provoked the *Apology for Poetry*. But this was merely an offshoot of the wider controversy which we associate with the name of Martin Marprelate. The reading of these scurrilous pamphlets is sad work, and there is little to be gained by it. No one cares any longer for the arguments either on the one side or on the other, and they who wish to understand what is worth understanding in the matter turn, not to the pamphleteers, but to Hooker, who played here the part taken by Sidney in the literary dispute, and raised the subject to a level worthy of one "right noble, virtuous and learned." The Marprelate tracts have even less of literary merit than those which were written for the purpose of the critical dispute, and in themselves they would hardly be worthy of notice. But they serve to introduce Thomas Nash (1567–1601)—a name which cannot be ignored in a sketch of the beginnings of miscellaneous prose. The disastrous influence of the controversial spirit is shown by the fact that in his Marprelate pamphlets Nash sinks beneath himself and becomes, in the literary sense, negligible. Nevertheless, these pamphlets were effective for their purpose, and Isaac Walton was doubtless right when he declared that

Nash "put a greater stop to these malicious pamphlets than a much wiser man had been able." The controversy shaded off into a personal squabble with Gabriel Harvey, which was the occasion of Nash's *Have with you to Saffron Walden* (1596), a dialogue in a vein of wit which, though somewhat heavy, is copious and effective. We come closer to the province of the essay in *The Anatomy of Absurdity* (1589), a farrago of various matters presented with a great parade of learning; in *Pierce Penniless his Supplication to the Devil* (1592), where, in a style telling though coarse, the writer sets himself to lash the follies of the age; and above all in *A wonderful, strange and miraculous Astrological Prognostication of this Year of our Lord God* (1591), a piece of excellent fooling of the sort indicated by the Fool in *Lear*:—

> "Then comes the time, who lives to see't,
> That going shall be used with feet."

Form is lacking, and Nash knows not how to set bounds to himself; but in theme and treatment these pieces give a faint foretaste of the periodical essay of the eighteenth century.

The words of Dekker about Nash are worthy of attention: "Ingenious and ingenuous, fluent, facetious, T. Nash, from whose abundant pen honey flowed to thy friends, and mortal aconite to thy enemies." The honey and the aconite are both to be found in Nash, and there is only too much abundance. His power is indubitable, but he is utterly undiscriminating, and can rarely refrain from any poor quip or pun that rises in his mind So good a critic as Russell Lowell thought that Nash had a better claim than Swift to be called the English Rabelais; and there is a sense in which the judgment is sound. But it may easily be misinterpreted. In the profusion with which Nash pours his mind on to paper, in his unrestrained abandonment to every suggestion as it rises, the "abundance" noted by Dekker, there is something

Rabelaisian that is not to be found in Swift. But Nash is a far smaller man, and writer, than either Rabelais or Swift, and it cannot be supposed that Lowell thought the two comparable in literary greatness or nearly matched in genius. Witty as Nash is, his wit is often heavy and tasteless. His formlessness is irritating; and though he was the most effective satirist of his time, the reader feels that he would have been more effective still if only he had known how much more the half is than the whole. There is a good deal to admire in Nash, but also not a little to forgive

CHAPTER II

THE APHORISTIC ESSAYISTS

Although a few of Nash's tracts may fairly be classed as essays, it is obvious that he did not conceive himself to be initiating a new fashion of writing. Nor did he in fact do so. Neither did the critics. Still less can the forerunners of the character-writers be described as the founders of the essay: they are too unformed and non-literary. Dekker, the successor of Nash and his superior, comes chronologically after Bacon. The latter consequently is the first of English essayists, as he remains, for sheer mass and weight of genius, the greatest. It is, then, of peculiar interest to consider what he had in mind when he wrote the papers to which he gave the name of essays, and how he regarded these products of his pen. Obviously the general conception was borrowed from Montaigne, whose essays had appeared seventeen years before the earliest of Bacon's. Bacon felt at once that the form was suitable to receive many thoughts of his own mind, and not merely his intellect but his whole disposition made such a form as that which Montaigne supplied valuable to him. Bacon was extraordinarily discursive in his interests: he took all knowledge for his province; and while several contemporaries surpassed him in depth of insight into subjects which he had specially studied, few in any age have rivalled him in the capacity to utter pregnant thoughts on almost any theme. We may accept the judgment of experts that Coke was a profounder lawyer, and we may believe that Harvey was justified in jeering at the Lord Chancellor's knowledge of science. But we have to go back to Aristotle to discover

Bacon's superior in encyclopædic range of mind. Further, Bacon was thrifty of his thoughts and his literary material. Of material wealth he was careless, though he was by no means indifferent to it; but the treasures of his mind he felt to be a debt to posterity, and he willingly wasted none of them. The mass of papers which he left proves his extraordinary diligence, and the care with which he hived his wisdom. Macaulay has noted that the best collection of jests in the world—they are really something deeper than jests—was dictated by him on a day when illness had unfitted him for more serious work.

To a man thus endowed, and thus thrifty of time and of literary material, the essay was a godsend. Here could be preserved thoughts that would not, for the time at least, fit into any part of the *Instauratio Magna*, and yet were too well-developed and too coherent to be buried in a mere entry in a commonplace book. Bacon therefore takes the form from Montaigne, but fills it with material drawn from his own mind. There is all the difference in the world between the secluded and solitary French gentleman—once indeed a courtier and perhaps a soldier, but now merely the spectator of life and its shrewd critic—and the ambitious English lawyer and statesman, with one eye fixed upon the pole-star of philosophic truth, and the other watching the political weather-cock.

That Bacon regarded the essay as a receptacle for detached thoughts is evident both from the essays themselves and from his own words about them. He speaks of them as "dispersed meditations." He ranks them but as recreations in comparison with his more serious studies. Yet he is conscious of and pleased with their popularity. In 1612 he refers with satisfaction to "the often printing of the former" volume. In the "epistle dedicatory" to Andrewes, Bishop of Winchester, written in 1622, he says: "I am not ignorant that those kind of writings would, with less pains and embracement (perhaps),

yield more lustre and reputation to my name, than those others which I have in hand." And in the epistle to the Duke of Buckingham prefixed to the edition of the essays of 1625, he says that of all his works they have been most current, "for that, as it seems, they come home to men's business and bosoms." Their popularity is shown by the fact that they were early translated into French, Latin and Italian; and they still retain the favour they so speedily won. Few books of the kind have been so widely read, and probably no volume of prose in the English language has furnished so many popular quotations. It would seem that Bacon was not only pleased with their popularity but convinced of their importance. In the dedicatory epistle to Buckingham he speaks of them as "of the best fruits that, by the good increase which God gives to my pen and labours, I could yield." Naturally, therefore, he was anxious to have them turned into Latin; and though the Latin translation which we possess was not published till after Bacon's death, it was prepared under his own direction, and probably contains touches of his pen, if not whole essays from it. With regard to the comparative value of the English original and the Latin version, Bacon made the mistake usual in his time. It was the latter which he anticipated might "last as long as books last."

By extracts from the essay *Of Studies*, which was one of the ten published in 1597, and *Of Adversity*, which first appeared in the edition of 1625, Macaulay illustrated what he calls the two styles of Bacon. The contrast is striking but the soundness of Macaulay's inference, that in Bacon the judgment had grown faster than the fancy, may perhaps be questioned. Bacon wrote more than two styles; and, if the essay *Of Adversity* is more ornate than the essay *Of Studies*, there are passages in *The Advancement of Learning*—for example, the peroration to the first part—not less richly adorned and far more stately in movement than the former essay. Now the

Advancement of Learning was published in 1605. If, therefore, the change of style be attributed to the growth of Bacon's mind, it is necessary to suppose that within eight years of the first appearance of the essays he had reached a point of development in the imagination as high as that at which he stood at the close of his life. As this supposition is hardly tenable we must seek for some other explanation of the phenomenon. It is probably to be found in a change in Bacon's conception as to the function and the possibilities of the essay form. In the early essays the sentences are nearly all short, crisp, sententious. There are few connectives. Each sentence stands by itself, the concentrated expression of weighty thought. But this is not because Bacon's imagination was not yet developed, not because he could not have written in the richer and smoother style of later days, had he chosen to do so. It is because, at this period, the essay was, to him, literally and precisely an 'attempt' at a subject. It was something incomplete, something which ought to bear on its face the visible marks of its unfinished condition. It was a group of jottings, different from the memoranda of diaries and commonplace books inasmuch as they *were* a group. Such memoranda, too, may be "meditations," and they are certainly "dispersed." But they are apt to be dispersed over the universe, while the meditations of the essays are confined within the four corners of a single subject. The connexions are not worked out and expressed, but are implicit and can be supplied by the intelligence of an alert reader. Essays such as those *Of Studies* and *Of Suitors* are something of the nature of that running analysis of paragraphs which is occasionally printed on the margins of books. When, therefore, it is said that each sentence of Bacon's contains matter for a paragraph of an ordinary writer, the statement is true; but not so the implication that the Baconian sentence does the work of the paragraph. If Bacon had been treating the

subject fully, he too would have written the paragraph. It would not have been the paragraph of an ordinary writer, but the extreme condensation would be found no longer.)

(If we turn to the essays of 1612, and still more to those of 1625, we observe, indeed, precisely the contrast which Macaulay points out. Bacon finds room for conjunctions and connective clauses. He does more, he imparts warmth and colour to the style. His keen sense of analogy enables him to discover illustrations everywhere. Metaphors and similes are frequent, and sometimes, though not very often, they have a poetical quality. "Virtue is like precious odours, most fragrant when they are incensed or crushed; for prosperity doth best discover vice, but adversity doth best discover virtue." "It is heaven upon earth to have a man's mind move in charity, rest in providence, and turn upon the poles of truth.") "It is a poor centre of a man's actions, himself. It is right earth. For that only stands fast upon his own centre; whereas all things that have affinity with the heavens move upon the centre of another, which they benefit." "Suspicions amongst thoughts are like bats amongst birds,—they fly best by twilight." "A great estate left to an heir, is as a lure to all the birds of prey round about to seize on him, if he be not the better established in years and in judgment. Likewise, glorious gifts and foundations are like sacrifices without salt, and but the painted sepulchres of alms, which soon will putrefy and corrupt inwardly." Compositions in which such sentences as these occur are obviously a good deal more than mere jottings. Bacon's conception of the essay had developed, and therefore he clothed his "dispersed meditations" in a richer vesture! As essayist, it is true, he was still the philosopher in undress; but perhaps the popularity he had won had made him more fully conscious of the importance of the step he had taken in the little book of 1597. It was worth while spending time and taking

trouble to weave together the *disjecta membra* of his meditations; for, as he must now have seen, he had naturalised in England a new species of literature, and he was showing the way to the development of a new style of English prose. For the end in view it is hard to conceive anything better than the essays *Of Truth*, *Of Death*, *Of Adversity*. The general conception of the essay is still preserved. The subject is still treated incompletely. The essays are "loose thoughts, thrown out without much regularity." But though loose they are not disconnected, and for the irregularity there is compensation in the familiar ease and friendly confidence of the writer. Bacon is too stately, and his thought is too profound, to permit us to speak of the essays as the confidential chat of a great philosopher; but in them he comes as near that as his nature would permit.

Just here we detect the secret of Bacon's inferiority (of course merely *qua* essayist) to his model Montaigne or to the greatest English master of the form, Charles Lamb. The ideal essay seems to imply a certain lightness and ease, and a confidential relation between the author and the reader. That we find in *Oxford in the Long Vacation* and in *Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist*. But not in Bacon. Even where he most unbends Bacon is still stately and magnificent. The "toys" to which he descends in the essays are never more trivial than such things as masques and triumphs and gardens; and though of the former he says "it is better they should be graced with elegancy than daubed with cost," his taste for splendour appears conspicuously in the treatment, as it does also in his description of the garden. In Montaigne and in Lamb the subject is often unimportant. For such writers every road leads to the end of the world, and a title which promises only some graceful triviality may cover deep feeling, if not profound thought. The praise of cannibals may conceal a satire on civilisation. But in Bacon the subject always

is important, and however unsystematic he may be in his treatment of it, he never wanders beyond its bounds! Masques and triumphs are "toys," but they are discussed at nearly as great length, and with as strict adherence to the theme, as truth itself, or as atheism.

While it would be difficult if not impossible to make a satisfactory classification which should embrace all the essays of Bacon, it is easy to detect what are the prevailing sorts. Bacon was a moralist and a politician, and a large proportion, including many of the most interesting, of the essays deal either with the ethical qualities of men, or with matters pertaining to the government of states. His purely scientific interests make but little show. The conditions were not favourable, and besides, science was the subject of those *serious works in comparison with which the essays were* merely recreations.

As a moralist Bacon makes no pretence to system. To do so would have been to write something different from an essay as he conceived it. It would, moreover, have implied a disposition alien from that of the father of empirical philosophy. In this respect the modern mind is widely different from the ancient. Socrates advised the abandonment of physical investigations on the ground that they were too complicated; but on the other hand he undertook to inquire into the essential principle of justice in the belief that the investigation, though difficult, was by no means hopeless. The modern feeling is precisely the contrary, and no one did more to make it so than Bacon. By the aid of his method he hoped that the secret of nature might ere long be solved completely. He had no such hope with regard to the principles of morals. It is not clear that he was certain of the existence of principles of absolute validity. The *Essays* seem to be the work of an opportunist. Bacon admires truth, moral and well as intellectual. "Clear and round dealing is the honour of man's

nature.") But then falsehood is like alloy in gold and silver, which, though it debases the metal, makes it work the better. The impression here given is immensely strengthened by the essay *Of Simulation and Dissimulation*. Bacon approves of secrecy: "nakedness is uncomely, as well in mind as in body." But to preserve secrecy dissimulation is often necessary, and in some cases even simulation, or the pretence to be what one is not. This last, indeed, is "more culpable, and less politic, except it be in great and rare matters." But by these steps we are led to the conclusion that "the best composition and temperature is: to have openness in fame and opinion; secrecy in habit; dissimulation in seasonable use; and a power to feign, if there be no remedy." It is not an elevated or an elevating ideal. A careful and candid reading of the essay will show that Bacon's morality is higher than that of average humanity, and perhaps as high as is easily practicable in a workaday world. But the framer of such maxims could never have felt that awe of the moral law within which Kant coupled with the awe of the starry heavens above; nor is there in any Baconian maxim a suggestion of the spirit of the saying, Let justice be done though the heavens should fall. The principle to be inferred is rather, let right be done, and let truth be told, if it be not too costly. As a man must be judge in his own case of what *is* too costly, the standard is not extravagantly high.

On the whole Bacon gives the impression of singular aloofness from moral considerations. His maxims are prudential. He appears to be looking down with absolute dispassionateness from a height, and determining what course of conduct pays best. He condemns cunning, not as a thing loathesome and vile, but as a thing unwise. Occasionally he even lays down the rules for immoral conduct without a word of overt disapproval. In the essay *Of Suitors* he recognises indeed the existence of right and wrong: "There is in some sort a right

in every suit; either a right of equity, if it be a suit of controversy; or a right of desert, if it be a suit of petition." But he goes on: "If affection lead a man to favour the wrong side in justice, let him rather use his countenance to compound the matter than to carry it. If affection lead a man to favour the less worthy in desert, let him do it without depraving or disabling the better deserver." Was ever moralist so impartial between right and wrong? Let the wrongdoer be moderate. But he seems to be so advised, less in the interest of the sufferer, than because in pushing matters to an extreme there is danger to the perpetrator of the wrong.

This impression is confirmed by the tone and substance of a remarkable group of essays which deal neither with moral principles in the individual, nor with the interests of the state, but with domestic relations and with special ties between man and man. Few readers of Bacon can have been insensitive to the extraordinary coldness of the essays *Of Parents and Children*, *Of Marriage and Single Life* and *Of Love*. Perhaps the defects of the essay *Of Friendship* are less obtrusive, but a little consideration shows that they are cognate. The view is fundamentally utilitarian. Here certainly is the philosophy of fruit. Bacon values friendship highly, but mainly for the fruits to be gathered from it—comfort to the emotions, light to the understanding, aid in the affairs of life. "A friend is another himself," and something more. But it is always what a man receives from his friend, never for a moment what he gives, that is insisted on. He never hints that a man may be ennobled by a deed of pure unselfishness. Apparently the blessedness of giving had no place among Bacon's beatitudes.

So it is too with the essays on the domestic relations. Wife and children are "hostages to fortune," "impediments to great enterprises, either of virtue or mischief." Bacon's recognition of the moral development due to those relations

is most inadequate. It is true he sees that "wife and children are a kind of discipline of humanity," but he seems hardly conscious of any wider influence. And apparently he thinks the balance of advantage swings to the other side; for he says that "unmarried men are the best friends, best masters and best servants," though he adds that they are "not always the best subjects." Evidently Bacon was both deficient in and disposed to underrate the emotional element. His own marriage was a marriage of convenience; and though his condemnation of the excesses of the passion of love is fully justified, the pronouncement that it is "the child of folly," and the advice to sever it wholly from the serious affairs and actions of life, seem to indicate coldness of blood and heart. Contemporaries, uncharitably and perhaps unjustly, suspected him to be more susceptible of the meaner than of the more generous passions, and saw in the essay *Of Deformity*, a covert satire on his cousin Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury.

An examination of Bacon's attitude towards religion leads to similar results. His belief in religion, like his belief in moral principles, was largely prudential and was destitute of fervour. It had its root in the understanding; the religion of saints and martyrs has its root in the heart. Bacon's declaration in the essay *Of Atheism* that he "had rather believe all the fables in the Legend, and the Talmud, and the Alcoran, than that this universal frame is without a mind," is perfectly sincere. But if circumstances had tempted him to sign a declaration to the contrary, his conscience would never have forced him, as Cranmer's did, to hold his right hand in the flames. The essay *Of Unity of Religion* is the work of a political opportunist. It views religion as "the chief band of human society," and Bacon's main preoccupation is to determine how it may be made most useful in that capacity. Most remarkable of all perhaps is the essay *Of Death*—remark-

able not so much for what it says as for what it leaves unsaid. As Dr. Abbott points out, the hopes and fears of a second life are absent; for the bare remark that "the contemplation of death as the wages of sin and passage to another world, is holy and religious," can hardly be regarded as a recognition of them. Such a conventional acknowledgment, followed by nothing, is almost more striking than complete silence. It is a fair inference that such hopes and fears counted for little in Bacon's case. Though he could upon occasion compose grand prayers, religion seems to have played very little part in his life. The division he set up between faith and reason enabled him to relegate it to a world distant from that in which he lived.

When he can, Bacon loves to escape from the private and personal to the political aspect of the question with which he deals. This he does not only in the discussion of unity in religion, but in the treatment of marriage. Evidently he felt himself more at home in the character of statesman than in that of moralist, and among the weightiest of his essays are those which treat of political questions. Nowhere does his wisdom show to better advantage. The essay *Of Plantations* is a compendium of principles whose soundness has been gradually established by the experience of generations and centuries. Had they been accepted from Bacon the worst mistakes of England in her relations with the colonies might have been avoided. Modern humanitarianism seems to be anticipated in the remark, "I like a plantation in a pure soil, that is, where people are not displanted to the end to plant in others. For else it is rather an extirpation than a plantation." And the advice to use savages justly and graciously; to fight in their defence, but not to win their favour by helping them to invade their enemies; and frequently to send some of them to the colonising country, so that they may teach a higher civilisation on their return,—all this rises to

the highest point attained by English opinion after an experience of three centuries. It is immeasurably superior to that which was lately exemplified in what was sardonically called the Congo Free State. Of the essence of wisdom, as well as of humanity, is the denunciation of "the base and hasty drawing of profit in the first years," and the declaration that "it is a shameful and unblessed thing to take the scum of the people, and wicked condemned men, to be the people with whom you plant." Bacon's countrymen learnt this only when the colonies showed that they would no longer endure the treatment which he had condemned. We have to bear such facts in mind in order to do justice to the marvellous prescience and elevation of mind shown in this essay. In his capacity of political moralist Bacon seems to shake off the fetters which cramp him when he is dealing with individual morality; or rather, perhaps, it is the fact that he is always, at heart, a political moralist that lowers his tone in the other class of cases. The accepted standard of the ethics of public life is to this day, even outside Germany, lower than that of private life. In Bacon's time the difference was still wider—*how* wide may be gathered from the bitter irony of More's *Utopia*; for there had been no great improvement in the century intervening between More and Bacon.

There is no other of the political essays which shows Bacon so immeasurably superior to his time as that *Of Plantations*. Mr. Reynolds, in his edition of the *Essays*, has shown that in the essay *Of Usury* Bacon has not only fallen into fallacies, but that they are fallacies some of which had been transcended by at least one contemporary, Mun. The subject of the essay *Of Empire*, monarchs and their policy towards their subjects and towards rival monarchs, has lost much of its interest and importance. *Of the True Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates* is, to the modern mind, too exclusively concerned with war and military policy; and even the essay *Of Seditions and*

Troubles, full as it is of ripe wisdom, touches no principles so large or so generous as those which are expressed in the course of the discussion of colonies. Nevertheless, there is not one of these essays which does not show that Bacon had mastered some principle which probably no contemporary had grasped. The remark, for example, that "to be master of the sea is an abridgement of a monarchy," with the paragraph which follows, embodies a truth illustrated again and again in English history—a truth which, though it was familiar to Thucydides, was first adequately expounded by an American writer in the present generation, Captain, afterwards Admiral, Mahan. Essays filled with thought so massive could only be written by a Bacon; and in this respect the earliest of English essayists still stands alone. It took Ulysses to draw the bow of Ulysses. But though it was impossible to rival Bacon, it was not difficult to take hints from him. He did more than introduce a new literary form: he took one of the longest steps ever taken in the evolution of English prose style; a step which set that style upon the road which it travelled, though not without divagations, down to the days of Swift and Addison. English prose was already, before Bacon, or independently of him, rich and sonorous. Hooker, the last book of whose *Ecclesiastical Polity* was published in the same year with Bacon's earliest essays, still ranks as one of our greatest stylists. So does Raleigh, who had written several things before that date, though his *History of the World* did not appear till seventeen years later. But while these writers have majesty and strength, while in their hours of inspiration they were able to write as few have written since, while Raleigh's apostrophe to death remains absolutely unsurpassed, it cannot be said that they were masters of a style suited to all the purposes which prose must subserve. It was admirable for great themes and for moments of elevation, but ill adapted to the pedestrian passages which must link such themes and

moments one to another. The sentences were inconveniently long, and even in the hands of the most skilful writers were frequently involved and obscure. Parentheses were extremely common. These faults were characteristic not only of scholars; and there is no need to go for illustration to the Euphuists. Even men who, like Richard Hakluyt, were primarily simple men of action, fall into similar vices, because no model of a style consistently simple and clear had yet been set. The same is true of Bacon himself in his larger and more sustained works. But in the *Essays* he *did* set the example, he *did* furnish the model. By the very plan and conception, almost of necessity the sentences had to be short. They are so even in the later essays. With shortness came lucidity. The essays of Bacon have to be read slowly and thoughtfully, not because the style is obscure, but because they are extremely condensed and the thought is profound. The grammatical structure is sometimes loose, but it is rarely ambiguous.

With shortness came also flexibility. The older style was cumbrous: it could rise, but it could not easily sink: to adapt Goldsmith's jest about Johnson, it might befit the mouths of whales, but hardly those of little fishes. The new style of Bacon fitted itself as easily to buildings and gardens, or to suitors and ceremonies, as to truth and death. It could sink to the familiarity of likening money to muck, not good unless be spread, or rise to a comparison between the movements of the human mind and the movements of the heavenly bodies. To Bacon, in short, we are largely indebted for making good that which had hitherto been the chief defect of English literature. Till the closing years of the sixteenth century, except in translations, no one had shown a mastery of the principles of prose. Then Bacon showed such mastery, and Shakespeare in even higher degree than Bacon. Shylock's tremendous outburst in the first scene of the third act of

The Merchant of Venice, and Antonio's letter in the scene following it, are models as superb in prose as are the lines on mercy in verse.

The example set by Bacon was followed by two men who have little in common with him and but a slender share of his gifts—Sir William Cornwallis, whose *Essays* were published in 1600, and Robert Johnson, who thought even essay too ambitious a name, and called his little volume *Essaies, or rather Imperfect Offers* (1601). Johnson took a special interest in education; Cornwallis was discursive in treatment and varied in his themes, though he showed a preference for abstract qualities, such as *Patience, Humility, Vanity, Ambition.* He had views of his own upon the art of essay-writing. "I hold," he says, "neither Plutarch's, nor none of these ancient short manner of writings, nor Montaigne's, nor such of this latter time to be rightly termed Essays, for though they be short, yet they are strong, and able to endure the sharpest trial: but mine are Essays, who am but newly bound prentice to the inquisition of knowledge, and use these papers as a painter's boy a board, that is trying to bring his hand and his fancy acquainted." His own reflections certainly are rather shallow—*not* strong, nor able to endure the sharpest trial. But for his historical position he would scarcely deserve mention. One of his gifts, however, may be noticed. He shows considerable critical insight. He was an admirer of Shakespeare, and allusions to *Hamlet, Othello* and other plays are scattered through the essays in the later editions. So too he warmly praises the English translation of Montaigne.

There was one writer who came near bending the bow of the English Ulysses—Ben Jonson. The great dramatist has received his full meed of praise and fame as a poet, and perhaps even more than his meed; but in spite of the warm eulogy of a few discerning critics his prose, which is quite worthy of

comparison even with Bacon's, has been shamefully neglected. Dryden perceived Jonson's greatness as a critic, and declared that he had laid down "as many and profitable rules for perfecting the stage, as any wherewith the French can furnish us." Swinburne read him with characteristic discernment, and expressed his admiration, unfortunately with characteristic exaggeration. He compares Jonson with Bacon, very much to the disadvantage of the latter. "Donne's verses [the *Anniversaries*]," he says, "are as far above Gray's [the *Odes*] as Jonson's notes or observations on men and morals, on principles and on facts, are superior to Bacon's in truth of insight, in breadth of view, in vigour of reflection and in concision of eloquence." And again: "From the ethical point of view which looks merely or mainly to character, the comparison is little less than an insult to the Laureate; and from the purely intelligent or æsthetic point of view I should be disposed to say, or at least inclined to think, that the comparison would be hardly less unduly complimentary to the Chancellor." The exaggeration here carries its own corrective. Wide differences of opinion may legitimately be held as to the ethics of Bacon; but it is absurd to suggest that any man is so great as to be insulted by being compared with him intellectually. It is all the more absurd to exalt Jonson so greatly because, as is hinted in the sub-title, *Discoveries* is largely composed of extracts and adaptations from Jonson's reading.[1] But though Swinburne has thus damaged his own cause, the high opinion he held of Jonson's *Discoveries* is (apart from the comparison with Bacon and the question of originality) essentially just. He is wrong rather in his needless depreciation of Bacon than in his panegyric of Jonson; but he is further wrong in that he has not made the necessary deduction from the credit of Jonson on the score of his

[1] The question of Jonson's originality is admirably dealt with in Castelain's edition of *Discoveries*.

inferior originality. Not merely did Jonson not introdnce the essay, as Bacon may reasonably be said to have done, but it has been proved beyond dispute that he owed the substance of his thought in very great measure to other writers.

Timber, or Discoveries, is among the latest of Jonson's works. It was not printed till 1641, and internal evidence points to the conclusion that much of it was not written till after 1630. The extraordinary neglect from which it has suffered may be explained partly by the remissness of editors. Outwardly it has the appearance of a collection of loose jottings, 171 in number, varying in length from merely a sentence or so to the dimensions of one of the shorter Baconian essays. But if we look to the substance, we find in several cases that the notes are not really disjointed but connected and, in some measure, systematic. Thus, there is an excellent group of four notes which constitute jointly an essay on the principles of art, or, as Jonson phrases it, 'picture.' Another group is seen to be a thoughtful and weighty essay on style; and a third should be read together as an essay on government. These notes, therefore, are considerably less discursive than, on the surface, they appear to be. If their real connexions were indicated, one hindrance to their popularity would be removed; for men are apt to shun such meditations as seem to them to be too 'dispersed.' They want a certain continuity of thought.

As Bacon's essays have been divided into moral and political, so may Jonson's notes be classed as mainly moral and critical. In the sphere of morals Swinburne's preference for him as against Bacon may be justified. There is a fervour and generosity in Jonson which cannot be paralleled from Bacon. Take for example the beautiful note, headed *Beneficia*:—

"Nothing is a courtesy unless it be meant us; and that friendly and lovingly. We owe no thanks to rivers, that they

carry our boats; or winds, that they be favouring and fill our sails; or meats, that they be nourishing. For these are what they are necessarily. Horses carry us, trees shade us, but they knew it not. It is true, some men may receive a courtesy and not know it; but never any man received it from him that knew it not. Many men have been cured of disease by accidents; but they were not remedies. I myself have known one helped of an ague by falling into a water, another whipped out of a fever; but no man would ever use these for medicines. It is the mind, and not the event, that distinguisheth the courtesy from wrong. My adversary may offend the judge with his pride and impertinences, and I win the cause, but he means it not *me* as a courtesy. I scaped pirates by being shipwrecked, was the wreck a benefit therefore? No, the doing of courtesies aright, is the mixing of the respects for his own sake, and for mine. He that doth them merely for his own sake, is like one that feeds his cattle to sell them: he hath his horse well drest for Smithfield." Or take the note on truth:—

"Without truth all the actions of mankind are craft, malice, what you will, rather than wisdom. . . . Nothing is lasting that is feigned; it will have another face than it had ere long. As Euripides saith, 'No lie ever grows old.'" Equally admirable for terse wisdom are the note on parasites; the group of six on envy; that which deals with good men and bad men; and the powerful discussion of the love of money. No one who reads these notes with care will deny to Jonson the title of a moralist, and a weighty one.

In the department of criticism it was hardly possible for Jonson to fail, for he had been thinking of the subject all his life. His own application of his principles in the drama prepares us to differ from him; and in his famous note on Shakespeare there is a touch of condescension which makes it less surprising to discover that there are certain aspects of

beauty to which he was blind. But no Englishman had at that date expressed so much critical truth as is condensed into the two essays on painting and on style. Even where we may think him wrong there is in Jonson's remarks a robust sense that makes us respect him as we respect his namesake of the following century. And as his sentences are invariably the expression of thought in himself, so they are the cause of thought in others. Few writers are more suggestive, few more sound and just. No one has written more judiciously on the proper mean between archaism and neologism:—

"Custom is the most certain mistress of language, as the public stamp makes the current money. But we must not be too frequent with the mint, every day coining, nor fetch words from the extreme of utmost ages; since the chief virtue of a style is perspicuity, and nothing so vicious in it as to need an interpreter. Words borrowed of antiquity do lend a kind of majesty to style, and are not without their delight sometimes. For they have the authority of years, and out of their intermission do win themselves a kind of grace—like newness. But the eldest of the present, and newest of the past language, is the best. For what was the ancient language, which some men so dote upon, but the ancient custom? Yet when I name custom, I understand not the vulgar custom; for that were a precept no less dangerous to language than life, if we should speak or live after the manner of the vulgar: but that I call custom of speech, which is the consent of the learned; as custom of life, which is the consent of the good." No one, again, has a truer conception of the use of ornament in diction:—

"Some words are to be culled out for ornament and colour, as we gather flowers to strow houses, or make garlands; but they are better when they grow to our style; as in a meadow, where though the mere grass and greenness delight, yet the variety of flowers doth heighten and beautify."

Criticism of a somewhat different kind is to be found in the note entitled *Ingeniorum Discrimina*, which is justly praised by Swinburne for "its soundness of judgment, its accuracy of definition, and its felicity of expression." The remarks on the essayists, are, for the present purpose, peculiarly interesting. Although he was at the moment invading their sphere, Jonson thought but meanly of them, and declared that all of them, "even their master Montaigne," "turn over all books," and "write out what they presently find or meet, without choice."

Jonson was a man of wide range as well as of extraordinary power of thought, and although in the essay on government he is off his beat, even here he comes with credit through the ordeal of comparison with Bacon. The essay is as close-packed with thought as any of Bacon's own. The two notes on clemency are as honourable to Jonson's heart as they are to his head; that on an illiterate prince, and the one which follows it, are almost perfect; and there is a very happy union of wisdom with wit in *Mores Aulici*:—

"I have discovered, that a feigned familiarity in great ones, is a note of certain usurpation on the less. For great and popular men feign themselves to be servants to others, to make these slaves to them. So the fisher provides bait for the trout, roach, dace, etc., that they may be food for him."

The quotations sufficiently illustrate Jonson's style. It combines lucidity, terseness and strength in a degree rivalling even Bacon's. It is capable of rising to eloquence, but a plain subject is treated in a plain and simple way. In his use of ornament Jonson obeys his own rule: his flowers of speech are such as "grow to" his style. He is absolutely free from the vice of euphuism. In the art of coining epigrammatic phrases he has had few equals. He speaks of a tedious person as "one that touched neither heaven nor earth in his discourse." The self-taught man, if he be proud of his tuition,

is annihilated in a dozen words: "He that was only taught by himself, had a fool for his master." This mastery of epigram is a dangerous gift, as the character-writers of Jonson's time showed. But it was dangerous to them because they were men of third-rate power. They were perpetually straining after epigram; in Jonson's mind the epigram rose naturally and easily. Their flowers were culled; his grew in the meadow of his thought. They were proud when they could compose a piece wholly of epigrams; but Jonson knew that unmixed epigram was as unpalatable as a dish of pepper alone. In a word, his style is the expression of a genius which never ceases to be common sense; and *Discoveries* may be taken as one of the most trustworthy of guides upon almost any subject with which it deals.

If it be permissible to treat as literature a book which was not written by its author, then by virtue of *Table-Talk* John Selden (1584–1654) deserves a place beside Bacon and Jonson. More than thirty years passed after Selden's death before the book was published, but there is fair ground for concluding that it was put together within a short time after his death, and that not only the substance but a good deal of the phraseology is to be ascribed to Selden. At any rate, the credit of this remarkable book must be shared between him and the compiler, Richard Milward; and together they have produced a little volume which shows more mastery of the aphoristic style than anything else in English, except the works of Bacon and Jonson, which have just been commented on. The resemblance to Jonson is closer than the resemblance to Bacon; for Bacon's essays are in their own way finished works, and they underwent careful revision, while many sections of the *Discoveries* are merely jottings which the author would probably have expanded had he lived to issue the book himself. *Table-Talk* was never meant for publication at all, and is still less formal than the *Discoveries*. But it is the concentrated

essence of immense learning and a life of thought. It is always weighty and often most felicitously expressed. Again and again it gives the ripe fruit of Selden's wisdom in reflections upon the subjects to which he had devoted his life. Spoken in the midst of civil strife, the opinions of Selden are characterised by a moderation and a judicial balance which would have been equally displeasing to the zealots of both parties. Thus Selden had far too high a conception of the power and rights of the State to please the High Church. "So [by the stronger party] religion was brought into kingdoms, so it has been continued, and so it may be cast out when the State pleases." And in speaking of religion, to the question whether the Church or the Scripture is judge of religion he answers, "In truth neither, but the State." On the other hand, he would have pleased the zealots of dissent if possible even less. The whole current of his thought, as the most casual reader must see, runs against them; but there is a homely vigour in his refutation of one of their contentions that makes it worth quoting: "The main argument why they would have two sermons a day is, because they have two meals a day; the soul must be fed as well as the body. But I may as well argue, I ought to have two noses because I have two eyes, or two mouths because I have two ears. What have meals and sermons to do one with another?" The zealot on either side would have torn asunder the man who said: "Religion is like the fashion, one man wears his doublet slashed, another laced, another plain; but every man has a doublet: so every man has his religion. We differ about trimming." Here surely is a mind as detached as even Hume's in his discussion of superstition and enthusiasm.

Selden has the power, invaluable in literature, of conveying suggestion in a few words: "The King himself used to eat in the hall, and his lords sate with him, and then he understood men." Possibly, if he had continued to sit in the

hall and had still understood men, there might have been no Civil War. He has also a marked gift for felicitous illustration: "'Twas an unhappy division that has been made between faith and works; though in my intellect I may divide them, just as in the candle, I know there is both light and heat. But yet put out the candle, and they are both gone, one remains not without the other: So 'tis betwixt faith and works; nay, in a right conception *Fides est opus*, if I believe a thing because I am commanded, that is *opus*." If Selden had written more in the vernacular, and had devoted his powers to literature rather than to learning, he would have been unsurpassed in the union of instruction and entertainment.

CHAPTER III

THE CHARACTER-WRITERS

Though Bacon was the founder of a *genre*, he had no successors of his own sort except Jonson and Selden. The type of essay which came into vogue in the early years of the seventeenth century and remained popular till its close, is an interesting example of fusion. Emphasis is always, and rightly, laid upon its debt to Theophrastus. But it is not sufficient to point out this alone. We have already seen that the conception of the character as delineated by Theophrastus had been familiar for generations; but nothing came of it until other influences came into play. One of these was the influence of Seneca, to whom attention had been drawn by the rise of the drama. Another was the influence of the dramatists themselves, who both gave to and borrowed from the character-writers. There is a very intimate connexion between Overbury and Earle on the one hand, and the Jonsonian comedy of humours on the other. They, like Jonson, conceive of virtues and vices as embodied in individual men. Like him they are philosophical, yet their thought as well as his is concrete rather than abstract. The conception of character is analytical, not intuitive. But greatest of all is the debt of the essayists to Bacon. Not that they either did or could effectively imitate Bacon; they had not sufficient weight. His importance to them lies in the fact that he supplied that which enabled them to copy the model set by Theophrastus—a pattern of a style concise, pointed and sententious. Lastly, it must be noticed that if ever we are entitled to speak of a literary form as answering to something in the spirit of the age wherein it appears, we are so entitled in the case of the

'character-writers. For they are precisely the prose analogue of the metaphysical poets.' They have the same merits and defects, they show the same interests, and they rise, flourish and decline just at the same time.

Philip Bliss stands to the character-writers in a relation similar to that which Nathan Drake holds with reference to the eighteenth-century essayists. In his edition of Earle's *Microcosmography* Bliss in 1811 enumerated no fewer than fifty-seven characters and collection of characters, of which fifty-six were published between the years 1605 and 1700, the one specimen outside these bounds being Harman's *Caveat*, which has already been noticed. Forty-four years later Bliss stated that in an interleaved copy which he used he had noted collections sufficient to swell the list four-fold. Long ago all but a handful of these books were forgotten, and even the best of them are read by few except students and wanderers in the by-paths of literature. But the frequency of such productions in the seventeenth century proves that at that time they filled a need or gratified a taste.

We may illustrate the transition from the ordinary miscellaneous prose of the Elizabethan period, such as we find in Nash, to charactery, by the example of a man greater than any of the character-writers strictly so called—Thomas Dekker (1570?–1641?). In Dekker's *Bellman of London* (1608) the part descriptive of the various kinds of rogues has much in common with the *Characters* of Overbury and the rest. So has the latter part of *Jests to make you Merry* (1606–7?), and so, above all, has *A Strange Horse-Race* (1613), where the characters are knit together by the conception of the horse-race. This piece shows a reach of rather ill-disciplined imagination altogether beyond the ordinary character-writer. Here is Dekker's picture of Hospitality:—

"Against this wretch [A Niggard], (in brave defiance) stept forth an old Lord (that is now no Courtier; for he keeps a

place in the country, and all the chimneys in it smoke: he spends his money as he spends the water that passeth to his house, it comes thither in great pipes, but it is all consumed in his kitchen,) his name is *Hospitality*. It is a grave and reverend countenance; he wears his beard long of purpose,—that the hairs being white, and still in his eye, he may be terrified from doing anything unworthy their honour: his apparel is for warmth, not bravery: if he think ill at any time, he presently thinks well: for just upon his breast he wears his *Reprehension*. As a jewel comprehends much treasure in a little room, and as that nut-shell held all *Homers Iliads* smally written *in a piece of Vellum. So, though the tree of* his virtues grew high, and is laden with goodly fruit, yet the top-bough of all, and the fairest apple of all, he counteth his *Hospitality*: His bread was never too stale, his drink was never sour, no day in the year was to them that are hungry, *a fasting day*, yet he observes them all: He gives considerably every hour, but in reverence of one season in the year, all that come may freely take."

Even if we confine our view to his prose, however, Dekker was much more than merely a character-writer, and his style in other places rises to an eloquence of which the picture of Hospitality gives but a faint conception. In the character-sketches his sentences are usually short, as are those of all the character-writers; elsewhere they are generally long, and sometimes clumsily involved; for Dekker, like most of his contemporaries, was too much given to the use of parentheses. But as a rule he managed the long sentence with a skill which has never been common and at that time was rare indeed. The following specimen is taken from *News from Hell* (1606):—

"Now as touching the seven-leaved tree of the deadly sins, (which *Pierce Penniless* would have hewn down,) his request is unreasonable, for that grows so rank in every man's garden,

and the flowers of it so much in every woman's bosom, that till the last general autumnian quarter of the dreadful year, when whole kingdoms (like sear and sapless leaves) must be shaken in pieces by the consuming breath of fire, and all the fruits of the earth be raked together, by the spirit of Storms, and burnt in one heap like stubble, till then, it is impossible to clear the oaken forehead of it, or to lop off any of the branches."

The poet in Dekker frequently shows most attractively through his prose. *The Wonderful Year* (1603), a piece which commemorates the plague that had recently scourged London, could have been written only by a man of powerful imagination; and there is eloquence as well as strength and earnestness in *The Seven Deadly Sins of London* (1606). The apostrophe to London is particularly fine:—

"O London, thou art great in glory, and envied for thy greatness: thy Towers, thy Temples, and thy Pinnacles stand upon thy head like borders of fine gold, thy waters like fringes of silver hang at the hems of thy garments. Thou art the goodliest of thy neighbours, but the proudest; the wealthiest, but the most wanton. Thou hast all things in thee to make thee fairest, and all things in thee to make thee foulest: for thou art attir'd like a Bride, drawing all that look upon thee to be in love with thee, but there is much harlot in thine eyes. Thou sitst in thy Gates heated with wine, and in thy Chambers with lust. What miseries have of late overtaken thee? yet (like a fool that laughs when he is going to correction) thou hast been merry in height of thy sicknesses."

The value of Dekker's prose as a [illegible] regarding the manners [illegible] adequately. One of these, [illegible] been illustrated. The other is [illegible]

tiveness. Swinburne was right in hailing him with the words:

> "O sweetest heart of all thy time save one."

Whatever the theme Dekker handles, this quality is always present. *The Gull's Horn-book* (1609) is a lively satirical piece, ridiculing the dandies of the time; but there is little in it of the "aconite" of Nash. *The Bachelor's Banquet* (1603) discourses of "the various humours of women, their quickness of wits, and unsearchable deceits." But there is no bitterness in the discourse; Dekker's own word pleasant, in its modern sense, more correctly describes it. The setting is far more dramatic and the style freer than that of the ordinary 'characters.'

If we look upon *The Bellman of London* as belonging in part to the domain of character-writing, Dekker must be regarded as one of the earliest masters of the art, which was just springing up, not from Harman, but from the other sources already indicated. It is not quite clear how far Dekker consciously borrowed from these sources; but Joseph Hall (1574–1656), specifically avows his own indebtedness to one of them. In the epistle to the reader prefixed to his *Characters of Virtues and Vices* (1608), he declares that he is imitating the ancient moral philosophers, whom he calls "the divines of the old heathens." One class of these, he says, "bestowed their time in drawing out the true lineaments of every virtue and vice, so lively, that who saw the medals might know the face: which art they significantly termed charactery."

As one of the combatants in the Smectymnuus controversy, and as successively bishop of Exeter and of Norwich, Hall has left a name of note in the history of the English church. In his own day he had the fate of the controversialist, and was as much vilified by his opponents as he was praised by the men of his own side. The esteem of Lamb is a guarantee that

as an essayist Hall is worthy of consideration, and it is clear that his special gifts and tastes were such as to qualify him for character-writing. The essays of this type are largely satirical; for whether human vices and foibles be or be not more common than human virtues, it is at any rate easier to make capital out of the former. Now Hall was certainly by nature inclined to satire. While his claim to be the father of English satire is ill-founded, in the writing of his *Virgidemiarum* he was following no established fashion. Though not absolutely the first in the field, he was a pioneer; and we have his own avowal of the keen enjoyment with which he practised the art of satire. Indeed the enjoyment is excessive, and is one reason why Hall's satires, notwithstanding all their ability, are apt to leave a bad taste in the mouth. Their spirit seems hardly to be that which befits a Christian minister. But the satires were the work of Hall's youth: he was only twenty-four when the second instalment appeared. The earliest known copy of his *Characters of Virtues and Vices* is of ten years later date. The author had had time to grow mellow, he was doubtless influenced by a sense of the duties of his clerical office, and the plan of the work necessitated a view of human nature wider than that taken in the satires. He had to deal with virtues as well as vices; and so we find pictures of the patient man and of the faithful, as well as of the hypocrite, the flatterer, and the covetous man. As a rule, Hall, like Theophrastus, confined himself to the delineation of embodied qualities; but in the Good Magistrate he gives an example of a type which soon became common,—the representative of a calling.

Hall's practice as a satirist stood him in good stead as a writer of characters. The quality which, above all others, the character-writers aimed at embodying in their prose was pungency; and this was already one of the chief characteristics of Hall's satires in verse. But pungency unrelieved is tire-

some, and satire is apt to pall unless it is redeemed by the moral indignation of a Juvenal. The necessary relief is present in the *Characters of Virtues and Vices*. They are more varied and more humane than the satires, and they have that touch of sympathy which is absent from the latter. But while they are evidently the work of one who has watched men with keen intelligence, they show no trace of that sudden insight which is characteristic of the born reader of men. They often read like notes for Hall's sermons, and Fuller was right in preferring these more rounded and sonorous compositions. Hall, he says, is "very good in his characters, better in his sermons, best of all in his meditations."

The *Characters* are written with force and spirit, and have little or none of the archaism which is a feature of Hall's satires in verse. The title of "the Christian Seneca," which Fuller applies to Hall, gives a hint of the nature of his book. A fair specimen of it may be found in the picture of *The Unthrift*:—

"He ranges beyond his pale, and lives without compass. His expense is measured, not by ability, but will. His pleasures are immoderate, and not honest. A wanton eye, a liquorish tongue, a gamesome hand, have impoverished him. The vulgar sort call him bountiful; and applaud him while he spends; and recompense him with wishes when he gives, with pity when he wants: neither can it be denied that he wrought true liberality, but overwent it: no man could have lived more laudably, if, when he was at the best, he had stayed there."

In this passage not a word is thrown away. The English is terse and simple, the judgment balanced; the unthrift receives credit for the virtue that is in him, while his faults are laid bare. There is a remarkable absence of the special vice which was then beginning to pervade literature—the indulgence in conceits. It is to Hall's credit that, in the

main, he successfully resisted the temptation which so easily beset his contemporaries. But it would be too much to say that he was wholly free from it. The character of the hypocrite is tainted with this vice. He is "the stranger's saint, the neighbour's disease, the blot of goodness, a rotten stick in a dark night, a poppy in a cornfield, an ill-tempered candle with a great snuff, that in going out smells ill."

Fuller, as the above quotation shows, certainly did not overlook Hall; but he somewhat puzzlingly speaks of Sir Thomas Overbury (1581–1613), as "the first writer of characters of our nation so far as I have observed." Now the earliest known edition of Overbury's *Characters* is one which appeared in the year after his death, bound up with his poem *A Wife*. Did Fuller know of an edition at least six years earlier than the earliest now known? Very likely he did, for Wood in the *Athenæ Oxonienses* expresses the belief that the edition of 1614 was the fourth or fifth. Overbury, who died at thirty-two, seems then to have begun the writing of characters at an early age. It is reasonable to suppose his book to have been a very small one. The title of the edition of 1614 is: *A Wife . . . Whereunto are added many witty Characters, and conceited News, written by himself and other learned Gentlemen his friends.* This collection contained only twenty-one characters, and even these, as the title proclaims, were not all by Overbury The collection which now goes under Overbury's name includes nearly eighty characters; but how many were really written by him it is impossible to tell.

As the victim of the weakness of James and the vice of the Countess of Somerset, Overbury has a place in English history more secure than that which he now holds, or is likely ever to regain, in English literature. The astonishing story of "the great Oyer of Poisoning" can never be wholly forgotten, but Overbury's poem *A Wife* has lost its savour,[1] and it

[1] The verses on *The Choice of a Wife*, however, still retain their charm

is highly improbable that the *Characters* will ever regain popularity. A natural style never dies, an artificial one knows no second birth. And Overbury's style is hopelessly artificial. The phrase "conceited news" in the title is significant. What in Hall is an occasional thread of tinsel is warp and woof in the essays of Overbury. He is concerned far less with the meaning of what he says than with the wit he shows in saying it. He calls a 'character' "wit's descant on any plain song;" and the phrase correctly describes those he himself and the "learned gentlemen his friends" drew. Substance is subordinate to form, matter to manner. A host "is the kernel of a sign: or the sign is the shell and mine host is the snail." A soldier "is the husbandman of valour, his sword is his plough, which Honour and Aqua-vitæ, two fiery metal'd jades, are ever drawing." A fine gentleman "is the cinnamon tree, whose bark is more worth than his body." An apparitor "is a chick of the egg abuse, hatched by the warmth of authority: he is a bird of rapine, and begins to prey and feather together." Phrases like these being the principal ornament of the piece, the most far-fetched (and therefore the most highly-esteemed) usually comes at the beginning of the essay. This is a trick of the style. It is easy to see that the main end of the writer is the display of his own wit, not the expression of truth. We can imagine the "learned gentleman" biting the end of his quill till the smart phrase strikes him, and then drawing the character to fit that, not according to the lineaments of nature. Hall really tries to depict the virtues and vices; Overbury is content to be witty and to amuse. His essays are more concrete than Hall's. He usually tacks the character on to some trade or occupation. A soldier, a tailor, a sexton, a chambermaid, a "mere common lawyer," a tinker, are among his subjects. But the character takes colour from the occupation, drawing thence its virtues or its vices.

Occasionally Overbury, or one of his coadjutors, shakes off the strained and unnatural affectations of his style and writes from the heart. For the author of *A fair and happy Milk-maid* certainly had a heart and, had he written a few pieces more of equal excellence, would have deserved no mean place among English essayists:—

"In milking a cow, and straining the teats through her fingers, it seems that so sweet a milk-press makes the milk the whiter or sweeter; for never came almond glove or aromatic ointment on her palm to taint it. The golden ears of corn fall and kiss her feet when she reaps them, as if they wisht to be bound and led prisoners by the same hand that fell'd them. Her breath is her own, which scents all the year long of June, like a new made hay-cock. She makes her hand hard with labour, and her heart soft with pity: and when winter evenings fall early (sitting at her merry wheel) she sings a defiance to the giddy wheel of fortune. . . . She dares go alone, and unfold sheep i' th' nights, and fears no manner of ill, because she means none."

The "news" from various countries and places, which is appended to the *Characters*, is an expansion of the essay worthy of note. The same style is preserved, and there is little change in substance, but the device betrays a sense of the need of variety of theme, a desire to widen the field of miscellaneous prose. It is an early hint of what afterwards came to be a feature of the essay as it was evolved by Richard Steele.

In the art of character-writing, however, both Hall and Overbury were far surpassed by John Earle (1601-1665). He is not free from the defects of his time. He is often very antithetical, and he is sometimes "conceited"; but his *Microcosmography* is, on the whole, written in such delightful English, is so full of that genuine wit which never becomes antiquated, and takes off so happily those traits of human nature which last from generation to generation, that, even

it only generally known, it might be hardly less popular at the present day than it was throughout the seventeenth century.

John Earle was born at York, and educated at Merton College, Oxford. He rose to eminence in the Church, becoming bishop of Worcester in 1662. Thence, in the following year, he was translated to Salisbury. This prosperity, however, came at the close of his life, and not without much battering did he steer his ship into so safe a haven. Previously, he had gone through the stormy period of the Civil War, had taken the unsuccessful side, had lost his property for the sake of Charles I. and had shared the exile of Charles II. Earle appears to have been one of the most estimable and lovable men of his time. He was eminent as a scholar, and sat in the Westminster Assembly of Divines of 1643. He translated Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity* into Latin, in order to make so excellent a work accessible to all men of learning; but the MS. was destroyed by servants after his death. He was still more remarkable as a man than as a scholar. Anthony Wood says of him that "since Mr. Richard Hooker died, none have lived, whom God had blessed with more innocent wisdom, more sanctified learning, or a more pious, peaceable, primitive temper, than he." Clarendon is singularly warm in praise. He declares that Earle was a man "of a conversation so pleasant and delightful, so very innocent, and so very facetious that no man's company was more desired, and more loved. . . . He was among the few excellent men who never had, nor never could have an enemy, but such a one, who was an enemy to all learning, and virtue, and therefore would never make himself known."

The little book which gives Earle his place among character-writers was published in 1628, and immediately became popular. There were five editions within two years of its publication, and the author lived to see the tenth. Like other

collections of a similar kind, it grew in bulk. There were fifty-five characters in the first edition; the sixth (1633) contained seventy-eight. No more were added in the later editions. The models which Earle imitated were Theophrastus in Greek and Overbury, rather than Hall, in English. At the time when he wrote the characters he was still a fellow of Merton, and had spent practically all his life there. His experience was necessarily narrow, and it is not surprising that types to be found in the university predominate. It has been remarked that, though we are told the characters were written in the country, *A plain Country Fellow* is the only country sketch which he made. Herein he is unlike Overbury, who, courtier as he was, always loved to escape to the country. This narrowness of experience in Earle is undeniably a disadvantage; had he been able to work upon a broader foundation, he would doubtless have given greater variety to the characters. But the point is perhaps less important than it seems on the surface. The very title of Earle's book indicates that each man is a little world, and in the larger world of a university and a university town the whole range of human passion was embraced. The material was good enough, provided the workman had sufficient skill to use it.

Now Earle possessed the skill. Endowed with a keener wit than Overbury, he seldom makes the display of that wit his main purpose. While Overbury is content with the superficialities of character, Earle tries to penetrate the depths. The former calls attention to his own smartness, the latter impresses us with the truth of his sketch. There is sound wisdom in the remarks on the *Younger Brother*: "His father has done with him, as Pharaoh to the children of Israel, that would have them make brick and give them no straw, so he tasks him to be a gentleman, and leaves him nothing to maintain it." *A She precise Hypocrite* is touched from the life; it is not merely a piece of wit, but truly represents a type of the

time: "She doubts of the Virgin Mary's salvation, and dare not saint her, but knows her own place in heaven as perfectly as the pew she has a key to. She is so taken up with faith, she has no room for charity, and understands no good works, but what are wrought on the sampler." Take again the picture of *A Young raw Preacher:* "He has more tricks with a sermon, than a tailor with an old cloak, to turn it, and piece it, and at last quite disguise it with a new preface." This is truth, but Earle knew that there was another side equally true, and, as a serious student of human character, he depicts that in the fine sketch of the *Grave Divine.*

Earle's wit can be sufficiently biting. Of *A Shark* he writes that "no man puts his brain to more use than he, for his life is a daily invention, and each meal a new stratagem." *A mere Formal Man* is one who "apprehends a jest by seeing men smile, and laughs orderly himself, when it comes to his turn." Of *A mere Dull Physician:* "The best cure he has done is upon his own purse, which from a lean sickness he hath made lusty, and in flesh. . . . His most unfaithful act is, that he leaves a man gasping, and his pretence is, death and he have a quarrel, and must not meet; but his fear is, lest the carcase should bleed. . . . He is a sucking consumption, and a very brother to the worms, for they are both engendered out of man's corruption." He who wielded a pen so sharp-pointed might easily, one would think, have made enemies; but Clarendon knew Earle after he had been softened by years.

Some of the sentences above quoted are much like Overbury's, but in Earle we never seem to lose touch of truth and reality. The wit is a vehicle of wisdom; and though the method is Overbury's, the substance is frequently akin to that of Hall. Occasionally—as in *A grave Divine*, *A vulgar-spirited Man* and *A staid Man*—the expression is serious and the author is undisguisedly an ethical teacher. In such

essays Earle is seen in the most favourable light. Best of all is the exquisite character of a child. It is comparable with Overbury's milk-maid; but while the latter is not wholly free from the suspicion of artificiality, Earle's piece has the ring of perfect sincerity:—

"He is nature's fresh picture newly drawn in oil, which time and much handling dims and defaces. His soul is yet a white paper unscribbled with observations of the world, wherewith at length it becomes a blurred note-book. He is purely happy, because he knows no evil, nor hath much means by sin to be acquainted with misery. He arrives not at the mischief of being wise, nor endures evils to come by foreseeing them. He kisses and loves all, and when the smart of the rod is past, smiles on the beater. Nature and his parents alike dandle him, and tice him on with a bait of sugar, to a draught of worm wood. . . . The elder he grows he is a stair lower from God; and like his first father much worse in his breeches. He is the Christian's example and the old man's relapse: The one imitates his pureness, and the other falls into his simplicity. Could he put off his body with his little coat, he had got eternity without a burthen, and exchanged but one Heaven for another."

Earle's book may be regarded as supreme among English works of the school of Theophrastus. Within a few years of its date the topmost point in a modified type of charactery was reached by George Herbert (1593–1633); for though *A Priest to the Temple*, which is better known as *The Country Parson*, was not published till 1652, it was written twenty years earlier. While the kinship between this delightful little book and the character-sketches is obvious, the differences between them are too important to be ignored. There is both a difference in plan and a difference in spirit and intention; and these two differences may be regarded as reciprocally cause and effect the one of the other. *The Country Parson* is not a

collection of unconnected sketches, but a short treatise in thirty-seven chapters, each of which delineates a phase of the parson's life—his knowledge, his praying, his preaching, his comforting, etc. We have seen that the prevailing vice with the character-writers was that they were more concerned with themselves than with their subject, and aimed first of all at the display of their own wit. Even Earle is not wholly free from this taint. But George Herbert is. His aim is to recommend religion by the delineation of a most winning and saintly life. His parson has that reality which so many of the characters lacked. The picture is no mere exercise of ingenuity, but the expression of Herbert's sincere feeling; and by the charm of this sincerity the reader is carried on from phase to phase, half unconscious of the author and of the beauty of his style. But even Herbert could hardly have produced this effect if the thirty-seven chapters had been descriptions of thirty-seven different men. Unity of design was essential to his purpose, while it is irreconcilable with the Theophrastic character-sketch. *The Country Parson* is one of the most charming of essays, but it is not in the strictest sense a 'character.'

The after-glow of the great Elizabethan age still illuminated Earle; but he was almost the last of the character-writers in this strictest sense who had any touch of real greatness. The subject-matter was exhausted, and later writers could do little more than repeat their predecessors. Human nature in the concrete is infinite in variety, but not so its types. They are as the letters of the alphabet to the words of a language. Thus the themes of the character-writers became threadbare, and the weariness which in consequence possessed the writers was from them transmitted to the readers. Brief mention will suffice for those of the tribe who still require notice.

Nicholas Breton (1545?–1626?) shows more plainly than most of his brethren the influence of Bacon, to whom his

Characters upon Essays, Moral and Divine (1615) is dedicated. The subjects are Wisdom, Knowledge, Love, Peace, Truth, Death, and so on. But the essays are mere exercises of verbal ingenuity, and the beginning of *Truth* will suffice to show how far they are removed from Bacon: "Truth is the Glory of Time, and the Daughter of Eternity: a Title of the highest Grace, and a Note of a divine Nature: she is the Life of Religion, the Light of Love, the Grace of Wit, and the Crown of Wisdom."[1] *The Good and the Bad* (1616) is a collection of fifty characters written in the same style, and conveying just as little meaning. *Fantastics* (1626) deals with the four elements, fish, beasts, man, woman, the seasons, etc. The style is of the would-be poetical sort. Zephirus with his sweet breath cools the parching beams of Titan, the nightingale tunes her throat to refresh the weary traveller, the nymphs of the woods in consort with the muses sing an ave to the morning and a vale to the setting sun—and so on till the reader's patience is wearied out.

Much superior to Breton is Geffray Mynshul (1594?-1668), whose *Essays and Characters of a Prison and Prisoners* (1618) is one of the best of these collections. Personal experience gives a depth which the characters of other writers often lack. There is feeling in his description of the prison. "It is a microcosmus, a little world of woe, it is a map of misery, it is a place that will learn a young man more villany than he can learn in twenty dicing-houses, bowling-alleys, brothel-houses or ordinaries, and an old man more policy than if he had been pupil to Machiavel." Similar praise is due to Wye Saltonstall, whose *Picturæ Loquentes* (1631) is freer in style, is less forced and has more genuine wit than any but three or four of these collections.

[1] Bacon serves as a touchstone in the case of many of the character-writers. Read his *Atheism* along with John Stephens's *Atheist*, and the pinchbeck imitation of thought is at once revealed.

Donald Lupton's (*d.* 1676) *London and the Country Carbonadoed and Quartered into several Characters* (1632) is interesting for a reason other than its merits. It illustrates [1] the difficulty the character-writers felt to impart variety. Abstract qualities are a very "scanty plot of ground," and we have already found modes of life and occupations introduced. Lupton dealt with places as well. Of twenty-four essays which 'carbonado' London, twenty-two treat of places, and of twelve devoted to the country, three are of this description. In the former section there are essays on London itself, the Bridge, Cheapside, Bridewell and Bedlam. Other writers, again, delineated countries—England, France, Scotland, etc. Yet another device due to this crying need of variety is seen in *A strange Metamorphosis of Man, transformed into a Wilderness* (1634); for there the author 'deciphers' his characters under the guise of birds and beasts, and even plants. The collection is not without merit, though the evidences of decline are patent. At a somewhat later date a new sort of variety is drawn from history, and in *The Times Anatomiz'd* (1647) Thomas Forde writes essays on such subjects as rebellion, war and peace. Sir William Coventry wrote the *Character of a Trimmer* long before Halifax undertook the subject, though not with the grace and insight of Halifax; and some twenty years after Forde political and sectarian subjects are not only present but prevalent in that collection of characters which nearly fills the second volume of the *Remains* of Samuel Butler (1612–1680). Butler was not known to his contemporaries in the capacity of a character-writer; for the characters were among the miscellaneous papers which he bequeathed to Longueville. They were edited by Thyer in 1759. More than a hundred

[1] Not for the first time. The same device is found in *Micrologia* (1621), a collection described as "characters, or essays, of persons, trades and places, offered to the city and country by R. M."

were printed by him, and others have recently been published in the Cambridge English Classics series. Most of them, says Thyer, were drawn up between 1667 and 1669, and in the choice of subjects we see the mark both of the man and of the age. *A modern Politician*, *An hypocritical Nonconformist*, and *A Republican* are the first upon the list. The tone is that of a man disappointed and disillusioned. He had lived through the time of trouble and adversity to his party, only to find that its ultimate success brought, for him, little either of honour or of reward. The author of *Hudibras* could hardly write a considerable volume without showing here and there wit and force. But the performance as a whole is tedious, and it is wholly unredeemed by that humanity which elevates Earle. While there is kindliness in even the most pungent pieces of the latter, Butler's wit is bitter, and he seems pleased that men are no better than they are.

There remains one man, Thomas Fuller (1608–1661), who belongs chronologically to the period of decline, yet is himself no example of decay. On the contrary, with the exception of George Herbert, he is the greatest man who ever touched the character-sketch, and his *Holy and Profane State* (1641) is the most readable book that can by any stretch of the meaning be included under the class of books of characters. But *The Holy and Profane State* is a book of characters with a difference Earle remains the most perfect exemplar of the school of Theophrastus; Fuller belongs to a school of his own. While others were straining after variety, and finding it sometimes at the cost of sense, Fuller attained it easily and naturally—by being himself. This is the vital secret which makes *The Holy and Profane State* so charming. With the exception of Earle, the other character-writers almost entirely banish themselves from their own pages; they are indeed so artificial that they may almost be said to banish humanity. But humanity is visible and Thomas Fuller is present in every

page of *The Holy and Profane State*. This has been his charm for every one who has ever fallen under his influence. It is attested, not only by the well-known criticisms of Coleridge and Lamb, but, it is safe to say, by all the critics who have ever written of Fuller appreciatively. For it is quite possible to be unappreciative; it is possible even to be repelled by his amiable garrulity. "The golden works of the dear, fine, silly old angel" is the phrase of Lamb in a letter to Gilman, and it suggests why the gold may be concealed from some eyes.

Fuller was a man of many gifts, not all of which are fully revealed by *The Holy and Profane State*, though he is there seen at his best. He had wide though not particularly accurate scholarship, and his powerful memory enabled him to accumulate an extraordinary mass of information. He told Pepys that he had dictated to four scholars in Latin, on subjects of their proposing, faster than they could write. It may be that the matter dictated would not stand a very searching investigation, but the power to do such a thing at all is remarkable. His wit is attested by Coleridge; but while the phrase about its being the "stuff and substance" of Fuller's intellect is always quoted, it is not so widely remembered that Coleridge further pronounces that Fuller's wit, "alike in quantity, quality, and perpetuity, surpassed that of the wittiest in a witty age."

In some respects the character-sketch was very well adapted to Fuller. The conceits which it encouraged neither repelled him nor presented any difficulty to his ingenuity. On the contrary, Lamb has said that Fuller's natural bias to conceits was so pronounced that "it would have been going out of his way to have expressed himself out of them." But on the other hand Fuller was discursive and diffuse, not to say garrulous; and the style of charactery was condensed to excess and discouraged wandering. It was this combination

of qualities that made charactery in his hands almost a new thing. There is nothing new in his opposition between the holy and the profane states, for that is only the "characters of virtues and vices" over again; but it is probably not too fanciful to see a glimpse of the "old angel" in the fact that, for Fuller, the holy state bulks several times as large as the profane; and it is certainly not a fancy, but the obvious fact, that a mind more concrete than the mind of the typical character-writer is revealed in his habit of illustrating the virtue or the vice by a specific example. Thus the Good Wife is illustrated by a biographical sketch of Monica, and the Good Husband, not without a certain quaintness (no one has ever written of Fuller without using the word), by one of Abraham. So too, when he comes to the profane state and deals with the Witch, we not only learn that formerly there were witches, that there are witches at present, that it is very hard to prove a witch, and that many are unjustly accused, but we have concrete examples in the Witch of Endor and, alas! Joan of Arc.

The stories with which Fuller loved to garnish his essays are another characteristic in which he differs from the rest of the character-writers! The stories were plentifully supplied by his wide experience and his rich memory; and they give a flavour to the essay wholly different from the flavour of Overbury or Hall. "Many have been the wise speeches of fools, though not so many as the foolish speeches of wise men," is a sentence of Fuller's such as might be found in any of the character-writers. But Overbury or Hall would have left it there and gone on to some fresh conceit or epigram. Fuller makes it the opening of a paragraph the body of which consists of a string of amusing anecdotes illustrative of the wisdom of the fool. One is the story of a hungry man who stayed in a cook's shop till the smell made him full, and when the cook demanded payment was relieved by the judg-

ment of a feeble-minded fellow, who decided that the poor man's money should be put between two empty dishes, and the cook paid with the jingling. Or take that lively illustration by contraries of the Good Parent: "Did not that mother show little wit in her great partiality, to whom when her neglected son complained that his brother (her darling) had hit and hurt him with a stone, she whipped him only for standing in the way where the stone went which his brother cast?" At once the tension is relieved. Epigram upon epigram wearies as surely and as soon as "gaiety without eclipse," but there is no danger of weariness when we have such relief as this. The human element is back again; and it becomes evident that the typical character-writer is an acrobat tumbling and playing tricks, whereas Fuller is a well-built man walking easily and naturally. The gymnastic feats are surprisingly clever, but at the end of the performance the acrobat is on precisely the same spot on the carpet where he began, while the simple walker has made considerable progress on the way to his destination. Ordinary charactery illustrates, not human life, but the writer's talent; Fuller devotes a greater talent, not to the exhibition of his own cleverness, but to throwing a real light upon some phase of human nature. Their wit ends in itself; Fuller's wit is also wisdom. Coleridge showed his customary sureness of touch when he added to his praise of Fuller's wit the remark that he had "equal superiority in sound, shrewd, good sense, and freedom of intellect."

Sometimes the stories impart a pleasant personality, a quality without which Fuller would not be Fuller, and one also which removes him far from the ordinary character-writers. They are among the most impersonal of essayists, while Fuller has been compared to Charles Lamb, perhaps the most personal and intimate. Fuller is not afraid of the pronoun I, and his use of it deepens the sense of intimacy.

For example: "Mr. Cambden, in his Remains, presents us with examples of great men that had little epitaphs. And when once I asked a witty gentleman, an honoured friend of mine, what epitaph was fittest to be written on Mr. Cambden's tomb? 'Let it be,' said he, 'Cambden's Remains.'" But the matter goes deeper than the mere use of a pronoun. Even when he speaks in the third person, even when he writes of far lands and of distant ages, Fuller's personality is always near. It imparts a tone, it is an essence, an atmosphere, an indefinable something which marks all he writes as unmistakably his. It was probably this quality more than anything else that won the love of Lamb. We shall see it presently when we come to illustrate Fuller in his closest approaches to the orthodox character-writers.

The stories quoted hitherto have been of the amusing sort, and Fuller liked them so when they were to be had and would serve the purpose. But his was a richly "veined humanity," and he has stories and reflections of the most serious sort as well. Occasionally the mere passing of time has brought some change which causes a smile to break where Fuller never meant to provoke one. He was wholly serious when he wrote thus in the *Life of Mr. Perkins*, the concrete example of the Faithful Minister: "He would pronounce the word *damn* with such an emphasis as left a doleful echo in his auditors' ears a good while after. . . . But in his older age he altered his voice, and remitted much of his former rigidness, often professing that to preach mercy was the proper office of the ministers of the gospel." He was wholly serious when he wrote the story of Dr. Whitaker thanking Mr. West "for giving him correction when his young scholar;" and time has left the gravity unimpaired. It is impossible to mistake the heart-felt charity of the remarks in the essay *Of Natural Fools*: "Only God's pleasure put a difference betwixt you And consider that a fool and a wise man are alike both in the

starting-place, their birth, and in the port, their death: only they differ in the race of their lives."

Many single sentences might be quoted which would leave the impression that there was little or no difference between Fuller and the character-writers as a body, or at most only such difference as there is between a witty man and a superlatively witty one. Mere verbal quips are of this sort. Many men might have written that the Good Parent "observeth gavelkind in dividing his affections, though not his estate," for that is merely a 'conceited' use of a technical term; or that the Good Physician prescribes cheap but wholesome medicines to poor people, "not removing the consumption out of their bodies into their purses;" or, "lest his apothecary should oversee, he oversees his apothecary." But it would not be easy to find in Fuller a paragraph which would not strike the reader as different from the paragraph of any other man; and sometimes even single sentences, though fashioned in the workshop of Theophrastus, seem to carry that stamp of personality which has already been referred to. "The most ancient nobility is junior to no nobility, when all men were equal," seems, somehow, to be as unmistakably Fuller's as the "grand old gardener" is Tennyson's. Certainly it is so with this remark about the Younger Brother: "Sometimes he raiseth his estate by applying himself to the court: a pasture wherein elder brothers are observed to grow lean, and younger brothers fat." But perhaps the best illustrations of that indefinable something of personality which Fuller imparts even to those passages where he most closely follows the style of charactery are to be found in the essay on *The Degenerous Gentleman*, who is, of course, the profane analogue to *The True Gentleman*:—

"Vacation is his vocation, and he scorns to follow any profession, and will not be confined to any laudable employ-

ment. But they who count a calling a prison, shall at last make a prison their calling."

"Having lost his own legs, he relies on the staff of his kindred; first visiting them as an intermitting ague, but afterwards turns a quotidian, wearing their thresholds as bare as his own coat. At last, he is as welcome as a storm; he that is abroad shelters himself from it, and he that is at home shuts the door. . . . Sometimes he sadly paceth over the ground he sold, and is on fire with anger with himself for his folly, but frequently quencheth it at the next alehouse."

CHAPTER IV

MISCELLANEOUS ESSAYISTS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

WHILE, in the early part of the seventeenth century, the delineation of characters was the most popular exercise of the essayists, it was not the only one. The instrument which Bacon had introduced could be put to many uses, and among the writers of miscellaneous prose there were a few, apart from Jonson, who trod more closely in his footsteps than the artists of charactery. One such was Owen Felltham (1602–1668), author of *Resolves: Divine, Moral, Political*,[1] a man about the events of whose life little is known, while his opinions are patent to every reader of his works. He was a Royalist of the most extreme type; and to understand what a political extreme is, we must go back to the writers of that age. Many have been surprised and pained by Fuller's adulation of Charles I. in the last essay of his *Holy State*: "His royal virtues are too great to be told, and too great to be concealed. All cannot, some must break forth from the full hearts of such as be his faithful subjects. But I must either stay or fall. My sight fails me,—dazzled with the light of majesty. All I can do is pray,"—which accordingly he does. It seems hardly possible to surpass this, but Felltham contrives to do so. "Here Charles the First and Christ the Second lies" is the last line of his epitaph on the royal martyr. He intended no irreverence; he as well as Fuller was habitually reverent; and the fact that he was so makes these staggering words all the more instructive. Clearly such a man could not love the Puritans, and the essay upon them, under the guise of moderation, betrays a strong dislike. He says there are few who will own the name; and

the reason is that it is for the most part a name of infamy. He himself is ready to love a Puritan—with a difference:—

"A man that submits to reverent order, that *sometimes* unbends himself in a moderate relaxation; and in all, labours to approve himself, in the sereneness of a healthful conscience: such a Puritan *I will love immutably*. But when a man, in things but ceremonial, shall spurn at the grave authority of the Church, and out of a needless nicety be a thief to himself, of those benefits which God hath allowed him: or out of a blind and uncharitable pride, censure, and scorn others, as reprobates: or out of obstinacy, fill the world with brawls, about undeterminable tenents: I shall think him one of those, whose opinion hath fevered his zeal to madness and distraction."

The *Resolves* are divided into two 'centuries.' Of these the first in order of time, which afterwards became second in order of arrangement, was published when Felltham was only eighteen. The second edition, to which a new 'century' was added, is dated 1628. The earlier essays are very short, the later ones are much fuller and altogether more mature. Ultimately the original 'century' was thoroughly revised and much enlarged, while some of the papers were wholly omitted and others substituted for them. The book was extremely popular, going through twelve editions between its first publication and the year 1709. In the eighteenth century both Felltham and his writings were almost completely forgotten, but a partial revival of interest in him took place early in the nineteenth century.

In his preface to the reader the author is careful to explain that these essays were written not so much to please others as to gratify and profit himself. But this may safely be taken as an attempt to deprecate criticism, and to suggest that the author could have done better had he chosen to take pains. The *Resolves* are written, not without ease, but certainly with care.

It is the ease which comes from study, not from indifference. Felltham's discipleship to Bacon is clear; but so is the greatness of the distance at which he follows his exemplar. "Too great a spirit in a man born to poor means, is like a high-heeled shoe to one of mean stature: it advanceth his proportion, but is ready to fit him with falls," is a simile with a Baconian smack. Felltham's essay on death is obviously founded upon and indebted to Bacon's essay on the same subject; but *Of Man's Unwillingness to Die* shows how much more rhetorical and how much less massive in thought the minor writer is. He loves ornate phrases—*e.g.*, "the wise man learns to know himself as well by night's black mantle, as the scorching beams of day," to which there is no parallel in Bacon. Occasionally he paraphrases Bacon: "It was the fool that said, There is n God; for certainly no wise man ever thought it, and, yet, th fool had so much wit as not to prate on't: It was but in his hear he said it. Impudence was not so great, nor inward convictior so strong, as that he could with confidence declare it with his tongue. Nor did he seriously think it in his heart: so that it proceeded no farther than a bare and lazy wish, because he would be glad it were so. But, doubtless, he could no more believe there was no soul in this vast world than that there vas no spirit to actuate his body." Obviously this is no more han an expanded and weakened version of a sentence or two n Bacon's *Of Atheism*.

There are well-marked differences, both of endowment and purpose, between Felltham and the character-writers. The thor of the *Resolves* had plenty of wit, though, apparently, t much humour. But in the *Resolves*, as a rule, his aim was t to display either. By far the most witty of his writings hat bright and lively performance, *A Brief Character of the -Countries under the States*, where, far more than in the *lves*, we are reminded that he was a contemporary of e.

There are other differences between the scholar Felltham and the master Bacon besides the enormous difference in force and genius. Bacon's subjects are, as we have seen, generally political or ethical. Felltham's are more distinctively religious, or moral with a religious tinge. Among his themes are: *That Man ought to be extensively Good; Of the Horror Sin leaves behind; Of Man's Imperfection; Of the Uncertainty of Life; Of Prayer; Wherein a Christian excels other Men.* The list might be greatly enlarged. The very subjects are suggestive of the pulpit, and the treatment is in accordance with the subjects. Now the vice of the pulpit has commonly been a tendency to truisms, a fatal proneness to take "glimpses into the obvious." And it is Felltham's vice too. A good example is to be found in the essay *Of Time's continual Speed.* It is written with more than usual care, and, so far as mere harmony of sound is concerned, the result is more than usually pleasing. Unfortunately the thought is trite and ordinary:—

"In all the actions that a man performs, some part of his life passeth. We die with doing that for which only our sliding life was granted. Nay, though we do nothing, Time keeps his constant pace, and flies as fast in idleness as in employment. Whether we play, or labour, or sleep, or dance, or study, the Sun posteth, and the sand runs. An hour of vice is as long as an hour of virtue. But the difference which follows upon good actions is infinite from that of ill ones. The good, though it diminish our time here, yet it lays up a pleasure for eternity; and will recompense what it taketh away, with a plentiful return at last. When we trade with virtue, we do but buy pleasure with expense of time. So it is not so much a consuming of time, as an exchange. Or as a man sows his corn, he is content to want it a while, that he may, at the harvest, receive it with advantage."

As a piece of writing, this is undeniably fine; and there is

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something in the cadence of the sentences[1] which suggests that Felltham may have read the work of a man who deserves a place among the essayists for the sake of a single performance only, because in that he attained an excellence of style which makes him, for once, the rival of the greatest masters.

William Drummond (1585–1649) of Hawthornden is better known as the author of poems than as the writer of *A Cypress Grove*; but, excellent as are his sonnets, the latter work is equally deserving of remembrance, and it comes nearer the topmost heights of literature than anything else that came from the same pen. Drummond had a genius refined and elegant rather than robust. In his personal characteristics we may probably find the secret of that acerbity which marks his portrait of Ben Jonson. Jonson was emphatically robust, but not so conspicuously refined and elegant; and he may well have rasped the nerves of the recluse of Hawthornden. Had he not been exceptionally fortunate in his circumstances, perhaps, in a rude age and country, the genius of Drummond would never have bloomed at all. The bloom certainly withered when he left his retreat and came out into the world. His best work, both in verse and in prose, is the expression of a spirit naturally reflective, thrown in upon itself by a solitary life, and rendered deeply melancholy by prolonged brooding about his lost love, Mary Cunningham. Drummond is not passionate, but there is evidence in his works of a genuine and deep affection, cherished until he falls in love with grief. Such is the tone of the best of his sonnets, with the exception of that on the Baptist, which sounds a deeper note. Such too is the tone of the *Cypress Grove*. This eloquent meditation upon death was first published in 1623. The immediate occasion of

[1] The essay *Of Time's continual Speed* is in the second 'century' (in the order of arrangement); but it is not one of those which appeared in the first edition.

it was a severe illness from which Drummond had suffered, but the fulness and richness of tone attests years of reverie on cognate themes. There was in Drummond from the start a strain of mysticism, and his studies, the events of his life, and the absence of event in his retirement at Hawthornden, all alike served to foster and strengthen it. He is akin to the English Platonists and is enamoured of the Platonic doctrine of ideas. His favourite conception is the oneness of the universe, and the oneness of the soul with that from which it comes. It is this which inspires him to his highest flight of eloquence in *A Cypress Grove*:—

"If on the great theatre of this earth amongst the numberless number of men, *to die* were only proper to thee and thine, then undoubtedly thou hadst reason to repine at so severe and partial a law: But since it is a necessity, from which never any age by-past hath been exempted, and unto which they which be, and so many as are to come, are thralled (no consequent of life being more common and familiar), why shouldst thou, with unprofitable and nought-availing stubbornness, oppose so inevitable and necessary a condition? This is the highway of mortality, and our general home: Behold what millions have trod it before thee, what multitudes shall after thee, with them that at that same instant run. In so universal a calamity (if Death be one) private complaints cannot be heard: With so many royal palaces, it is no loss to see thy poor cabin burn. Shall the heavens stay their ever-rolling wheels (for what is the motion of them but the motion of a swift and ever-whirling wheel, which twineth forth, and again uprolleth our life) and hold still time to prolong thy miserable days, as if the highest of their working were to do homage unto thee? Thy death is a pace in the order of this *All*, a part of the life of this world; for while the world is the world, some creatures must die, and others take life."

The stately English of this passage is unequalled by anything else in *A Cypress Grove*. The essay is not free from the faults of the time. The metaphors are sometimes far-fetched, and sometimes they are mere conceits. Drummond occasionally writes in order that he may display his 'wit': "To seek a reason, unless from the sparkling of God in the soul, or from the God-like sparkles of the soul, were to make reason unreasonable, by reasoning of things transcending her reach." —"Arches and stately temples, which one age doth raise, doth not another raze?" But the general level is very high: nearly three-quarters of the essay might be quoted with warm approval. While the following passage is inferior to the preceding one, it still gives proof that Drummond possessed a rare gift of style:—

"But that, perhaps, which anguisheth thee most, is to have this glorious pageant of the world removed from thee in the spring and most delicious season of thy life; for though to die be usual, *to* die young may appear extraordinary. If the present fruition of these things be unprofitable and vain, what can a long continuance of them be? If God had made life happier, He had also made it longer. Stranger and new halcyon, why would thou longer nestle amidst these unconstant and stormy waves? Hast thou not already suffered enough of this world, but thou must yet endure more? To live long, is it not to be long troubled? But number thy years, which are now——, and thou shalt find that whereas ten have outlived thee, thousands have not attained this age. One year is sufficient to behold all the magnificence of nature, nay, even one day and night; for more is but the same brought again. This sun, that moon, these stars, the varying dance of the spring, summer, autumn, winter, is that very same which the Golden Age did see. They which have the longest time lent them to live in, have almost no part of it at all, measuring it either by the space of time which is past,

when they were not, or by that which is to come. Why shouldst thou then care, whether thy days be many or few, which, when prolonged to the uttermost, prove, paralleled with eternity, as a tear is to the ocean? To die young is to do that soon, and in some fewer days, which once thou must do; it is but the giving over of a game, that after never so many hazards must be lost."

A Cypress Grove is perhaps the first conscious and sustained effort in English to write poetical prose. The style was well adapted to Drummond's habitual tone of thought, and he was tempted to retain it when he was writing upon subjects where the use of it is less defensible. What in *A Cypress Grove* is eloquence, in *Irene* becomes rhetoric. The latter, written in 1638, is a "remembrance for concord, amity and love, amongst his Majesty's subjects." Though the style is overcharged with ornament, there is force in this fervid appeal for moderation, at once to the country and to the king. The emphasis with which Drummond insists upon the blessings of peace to Britain betrays his fear that these blessings might soon be lost. Five years later he took up the subject again in Σκιαμαχία. But these later essays were not printed during his life, and had the author not also written *A Cypress Grove*, they would hardly be worth referring to now. Yet Drummond was by natural bent an essayist, and had he lived a century later he would, almost certainly, have shone in the company of Steele and Addison. As it was, he hardly realised his own gift. In all his prose writings except the *Cypress Grove*, he is too much dominated by the subject, and fails to leave that impression of personality which is the special charm of the essay. The path was as yet little trodden, and he imperfectly understood the nature of the art in which, nevertheless, he achieved one signal triumph.

We may perhaps take Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682) to be the successor of Drummond as a practitioner of the

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"But that, perhaps, which anguisheth thee most, is to have this glorious pageant of the world removed from thee in the spring and most delicious season of thy life; for though to die be usual, to die young may appear extraordinary. If the present fruition of these things be unprofitable and vain, what can a long continuance of them be? If God had made life happier, He had also made it longer. Stranger and new halcyon, why would thou longer nestle amidst these unconstant and stormy waves? Hast thou not already suffered enough of this world, but thou must yet endure more? To live long, is it not to be long troubled? But number thy years, which are now——, and thou shalt find that whereas ten have outlived thee, thousands have not attained this age. One year is sufficient to behold all the magnificence of nature, nay, even one day and night; for more is but the same brought again. This sun, that moon, these stars, the varying dance of the spring, summer, autumn, winter, is that very same which the Golden Age did see. They which have the longest time lent them to live in, have almost no part of it at all, measuring it either by the space of time which is past,

one, or almost any group, of them might be omitted without leaving in the reader's mind the sense of incompleteness. How could he know that the third book would be incomplete without that *omnium gatherum* of Chapter XXVII., from the musical note of swans to the providence of pismires in biting off the ends of corn? How could he guess that even after this the "sundry queries" of Chapter XXVIII. are still necessary? The truth is that each chapter is an essay in itself, virtually independent of the others with which it is grouped. For the unity and system which have sometimes been found in his works Browne is indebted to the critics who have discovered these qualities in him. He is essentially and always a desultory, though this does not mean a careless, writer, and his meditations are invariably 'dispersed.'

Browne, then, is not to be excluded from the province of the essay on the ground that he is the author of long and closely-articulated works. His only long work has hardly any articulation at all. For the most part, it is a collection of independent papers which the author has chosen to head as chapters. Is he then to be excluded on the ground that his aim and temperament are not the aim and temperament of the essay-writer? On the contrary, he is in soul and substance an essayist from start to finish, and if so he is certainly one of the greatest, perhaps the greatest of all. Take *Religio Medici*. Though so much shorter than *Vulgar Errors*, by reason of its superior unity, it of all Browne's works has, most nearly the character of a treatise. But, though Browne was a learned man of science, *Religio Medici* has none of the detached, impersonal, scientific spirit of a treatise. It is psychological, but not as the philosophers are psychological. Almost at the beginning the personal note is struck, the note which is characteristic of the essayist *par excellence*, the essayist of the school of Montaigne—

"I am, I confess, naturally inclined to that which mis-

art of writing cadenced prose? That he studied that art profoundly, and mastered it as few, if any, have mastered it either before or since, most students of his works will agree. Neither will any one dispute that, by reason of the *Miscellany Tracts* and *Miscellanies*, if on no other grounds, he is entitled to a place among the essayists. The question on which doubt may reasonably be entertained is whether his place among them is central, or merely on the outer fringe. The answer to that question must depend upon the view taken of the greater works of Browne; and it has hitherto been generally assumed rather than shown that these have more of the nature of treatises than of essays. But in point of length Browne's works certainly do not, with one exception, exceed the limits within which custom has confined the term essay. Few of Macaulay's essays are so short as *Urn-Burial*, and some of them are considerably longer than *Religio Medici* or *The Garden of Cyrus*. As to *Vulgar Errors*, it seems, no doubt, absurd to regard as an essay a work which, with notes, in Bohn's edition fills between 700 and 800 pages. But whoever looks below the surface will see that this formidable treatise has the character of a treatise only in the first book. There, indeed, we find a discussion of the causes of common errors, which is fairly orderly and as philosophical as it was in the nature of Browne to make it. But then, Browne was, in the judicious words of the judicious Hallam, "far removed from real philosophy, both by his turn of mind and by the nature of his erudition." In the subsequent books the unity is of the most superficial sort. Browne discourses about popular tenets concerning minerals and vegetables, concerning animals, concerning man, about popular customs, and about popular tenets cosmographical, geographical and historical. In short, if ever there was a book *de omnibus rebus et quibusdam aliis*, that book is the *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*. Real unity it has none; each chapter is independent of the rest, and any

one, or almost any group, of them might be omitted without leaving in the reader's mind the sense of incompleteness. How could he know that the third book would be incomplete without that *omnium gatherum* of Chapter XXVII., from the musical note of swans to the providence of pismires in biting off the ends of corn? How could he guess that even after this the "sundry queries" of Chapter XXVIII. are still necessary? The truth is that each chapter is an essay in itself, virtually independent of the others with which it is grouped. For the unity and system which have sometimes been found in his works Browne is indebted to the critics who have discovered these qualities in him. He is essentially and always a desultory, though this does not mean a careless, writer, and his meditations are invariably 'dispersed.'

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"I am, I confess, naturally inclined to that which mis-

guided zeal terms superstition: my common conversation I do acknowledge austere, my behaviour full of rigour, sometimes not without morosity; yet, at my devotion I love to use the civility of my knee, my hat, and hand, with all those outward and sensible motions which may express or promote my invisible devotion. I should violate my own arm rather than a church; nor willingly deface the name of saint or martyr. At the sight of a cross, or crucifix, I can dispense with my hat, but scarce with the thought or memory of my Saviour. I cannot laugh at, but rather pity, the fruitless journeys of pilgrims, or contemn the miserable condition of friars; for, though misplaced in circumstances, there is something in it of devotion. I could never hear the Ave-Mary bell without an elevation, or think it a sufficient warrant, because they erred in one circumstance, for me to err in all—that is, in silence and dumb contempt. Whilst, therefore, they directed their devotions to her, I offered mine to God; and rectified the errors of their prayers by rightly ordering mine own. At a solemn procession I have wept abundantly, while my consorts, blind with opposition and prejudice, have fallen into an excess of scorn and laughter."

What has this to do with system or science? It would be appropriate in an autobiography, and there is much besides in the *Religio Medici* that is autobiographic. Yet it certainly cannot be ranked with the autobiography of Gibbon or the *Confessions* of Rousseau. We might almost be reading an earlier Charles Lamb, and we are reminded that Lamb claimed to be the first of the moderns to discover the beauty of one of Browne's works, that he never sought to conceal his debt to them all, and that Browne was one of the two men whom he would most have liked to meet. There is no place for the *Religio Medici* in the literary scheme, except among essays of the personal type. In Browne's case the type is pleasantly flavoured with the science in which he had been

trained, and is elaborated with the care of an artist in words. But scientific or systematic *Religio Medici* is not.

Though Browne's life was prolonged considerably beyond the allotted span, his literary career, as measured by dates of publication within his own life, was short. It began with *Religio Medici* (1642) and ended with *Urn-burial* and *The Garden of Cyrus* (1658). In the interval was published *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646), as Browne characteristically entitled his discussions of common errors and delusions. *Christian Morals* never received his final touches, and did not appear till 1716. But though *Religio Medici* was not printed till 1642, and then surreptitiously, it was written considerably earlier. Browne himself dates it in characteristic fashion. "If there be any truth in astrology, I may outlive a jubilee; as yet I have not seen one revolution of Saturn, nor hath my pulse beat thirty years, and yet, excepting one, have seen the ashes of, and left under ground, all the kings of Europe; have been contemporary to three emperors, four grand signiors, and as many popes: methinks I have outlived myself, and begin to be weary of the sun; I have shaken hands with delight in my warm blood and canicular days; I perceive I do anticipate the vices of age; the world to me is but a dream or mock-show, and we all therein but pantaloons and anticks, to my severer contemplations." In order to tell his own age Browne links himself with the stars and with the great ones of the earth. It is no small part of his charm, and another evidence of the discursive character of his mind, that with him every road leads to the end of the world.

The second part of *Religio Medici* is even more exquisite than the first, mainly because of those intimate confidences, varying from the gossiping details at the beginning to the stately contemplation near the close, on his life as a miracle of thirty years.

"I wonder not at the French for their dishes of frogs,

snails and toadstools, nor at the Jews for locusts and grasshoppers; but, being amongst them, make them my common viands; and I find they agree with my stomach as well as theirs. I could digest a salad gathered in a church-yard as well as in a garden. I cannot start at the presence of a serpent, scorpion, lizard, or salamander; at the sight of a toad or viper, I find in me no desire to take up a stone to destroy them. I feel not in myself those common antipathies that I can discover in others: those national repugnances do not touch me, nor do I behold with prejudice the French, Italian, Spaniard, or Dutch; but where I find their actions in balance with my countrymen's, I honour, love, and embrace them, in the same degree. I was born in the eighth climate, but seem to be framed and constellated unto all. I am no plant that will not prosper out of a garden. All places, all airs, make unto me one country; I am in England everywhere, and under any meridian." "Surely it is not a melancholy conceit to think we are all asleep in this world, and that the conceits of this life are as mere dreams to those of the next; as the phantasms of the night, to the conceit of the day. There is an equal delusion in both; and the one doth but seem to be the emblem or picture of the other. We are somewhat more than ourselves in our sleeps; and the slumber of the body seems to be but the waking of the soul. It is the ligation of sense, but the liberty of reason; and our waking conceptions do not match the fancies of our sleeps. At my nativity, my ascendant was the watery sign of *Scorpio*, I was born in the planetary hour of *Saturn*, and I think I have a piece of that leaden planet in me. I am no way facetious, nor disposed for the mirth and galliardise of company; yet in one dream I can compose a whole comedy, behold the action, apprehend the jests, and laugh myself awake at the conceits thereof. Were my memory as faithful as my reason is then fruitful, I would never study but in my dreams, and this time

also would I choose for my devotions; but our grosser memories have then so little hold of our abstracted understandings, that they forget the story, and can only relate to our awaked souls a confused and broken tale of that which hath passed."

No wonder a work such as this was popular. The sale was so rapid that the first surreptitious edition seems to have been exhausted within a few months, and a second, also unauthorised, followed in the same year. In 1643 came the first authorised version; and in all there were fourteen or fifteen distinct issues, some of them accompanied by other works of Browne, before the close of the century—evidence of a popularity very extraordinary at that period. Nor was the popularity limited to England. *Religio Medici* was translated into Latin, Dutch, German and French, and won the ardent admiration of the great French physician Guy Patin. The story is familiar how Lord Dorset was charmed with the book on its first appearance and recommended it to Sir Kenelm Digby; and the latter has himself recorded how he sent for it, received it in bed, and then—"I closed not my eyes till I had enriched myself with (or at least exactly surveyed) all the treasures that are lapped up in the folds of those few sheets." This admiration gave rise to those *Observations* by Digby which it had been customary ever since to append to *Religio Medici*.

No other of Browne's works has ever enjoyed quite such wide favour as the first. One reason undoubtedly is that nowhere else is Browne so personal and confidential; and there is nothing in all literature more engaging than such egoism as his. But besides, most of his other works are inherently inferior to this first production. This is very obviously the case with the *Miscellany Tracts* and *Miscellanies*. The best of them all, that on dreams, contains nothing equal to the reflections on sleep and dreams towards the close of *Religio Medici*. In others, such as the tracts *Of Garlands*

and Coronary or Garland Plants and *Of Hawks and Falconry, Ancient and Modern*, we have illustrations of Browne's profound and curious learning, and of his occasionally acute power of criticism, but nothing that is not in these respects surpassed in his more formal works. The miscellanies were in fact the gleanings of Browne's harvest, answers to queries addressed to him by his friends, odd papers which he had not been able to weave in with his longer writings. As to the rest, *The Garden of Cyrus* goes far to justify Hallam's remark that the absence of "the controlling supremacy of good sense" deprives Browne of the place which would otherwise be his among the greatest writers. The famous passage beginning "But the quincunx of heaven runs low" is, it is true, one of the finest that even Browne ever wrote; but as a whole *The Garden of Cyrus* is fantastic and whimsical to the point of weariness. *Christian Morals* is wise and lofty, but spiritually no richer than *Religio Medici*, while it is destitute of the delightful egoism of the latter work. And highly entertaining as *Vulgar Errors* is, there are parts of it which are dull and commonplace. Neither in style nor in moral depth is it equal to the earlier work. Only those who find in it an important contribution to scientific thought can put it at the head of Browne's works.

There remains only *Urn Burial*; for it is surely a somewhat perverse criticism that has raised almost to a level with it the *Letter to a Friend*. But *Urn Burial* contains some forty or fifty pages of the most beautiful English ever written, probably the greatest piece of sustained eloquence in the prose of the language. It is the concentrated essence of Browne's genius. The spirit is fundamentally the spirit of *Religio Medici*. In both there is the same brooding thought; though in the earlier work it is evoked by the contemplation of the author's own life, and in the later by the relics of long-dead humanity. Both are instinct with the melancholy of Browne, a melan-

choly of his own, "compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects." Both, too, are profoundly mystical; for Browne is one of the numerous stumbling-blocks in the way of those modern theorists in whose view mysticism is characteristic of the Celtic race and is alien from the Anglo-Saxon. The style, too, is essentially the same; but it has developed. On the one hand, it has lost something of ease, on the other it is far more highly-wrought, richer and more gorgeous. The temper of the artist in words is manifest in the characteristic epistle dedicatory, especially in the closing sentence, where Browne weaves into his phraseology the theme of the work thus dedicated: "Having long experience of your friendly conversation, void of empty formality, full of freedom, constant and generous honesty, I look upon you as a gem of the old rock, and must profess myself even to urn and ashes, your ever faithful friend and servant." The first book sketches slightly the burial customs of many nations. The recent discovery of urns in Norfolk leads in the second to the more specific consideration of the urns used to receive the ashes left after cremation; but again the discursive mind of Browne diverges to the question of the population of Britain in the time of Julius Cæsar, and to other questions equally remote from the subject in hand. From time to time reference is made to some detail or other of the particular discovery which gave occasion to the essay; but the references are merely cursory, for the true subject of the essay is not the urns found in Norfolk, but the thoughts on mortality suggested by them. "Who knows the fate of his bones, or how often he is to be buried? who hath the Oracle of his ashes, or whither they are to be scattered? The relicks of many lie like the ruins of Pompeys, in all parts of the earth." These sentences in the epistle dedicatory strike the keynote of the whole. The opening chapters, with their curious lore, gradually work up to the reflections at the close, for which the whole has been

written. We have nearly reached the height in the closing paragraphs of Chapter IV: "Were the happiness of the next world as closely apprehended as the felicities of this, it were a martyrdom to live; and unto such as consider none hereafter, it must be more than death to die, which makes us amazed at those audacities that durst be nothing and return into their chaos again." . . . "It is the heaviest stone that melancholy can throw at a man, to tell him he is at the end of his nature; or that there is no further state to come, unto which this seems progressional, and otherwise made in vain."

But it is in the fifth and last chapter that the climax to which Browne has been working comes. It is like a solemn music, and Milton in his grandest mood might have written a sonnet upon it. Every paragraph is an almost matchless model of musical prose. The very first teaches us what to expect:—

"Now since these dead bones have already out-lasted the living ones of Methuselah, and in a yard under ground, and thin walls of clay, outworn all the strong and specious buildings above it; and quietly rested under the drums and tramplings of three conquests: what prince can promise such diuturnity unto his relicks, or might not gladly say,

Sic ego componi versus in ossa velim?

Time, which antiquates antiquities, and hath an art to make dust of all things, hath yet spared these minor monuments."

And so through the paragraphs, all famous, about the songs the syrens sang, about the circles and right lines that limit and close all bodies, about the darkness and light that divide he course of time, about the epitaph of Gordianus. Where there finer English than the "Oblivion" paragraph?—

"Oblivion is not to be hired. The greater part must be ntent to be as though they had not been, to be found in the gister of God, not in the record of man. Twenty-seven

names make up the first story before the flood, and the recorded names ever since contain not one living century. The number of the dead long exceedeth all that shall live. The night of time far surpasseth the day, and who knows when was the equinox? Every hour adds unto that current arithmetic, which scarce stands one moment. And since death must be the *Lucina* of life, and even Pagans could doubt, whether thus to live were to die; since our longest sun sets at right descensions, and makes but winter arches, and therefore it cannot be long before we lie down in darkness and have our light in ashes; since the brother of death daily haunts us with dying mementoes, and time that grows old in itself, bids us hope no long duration;—diuturnity is a dream and folly of expectation."

Flawlessness is even more rare in prose than it is in verse, and if all the pieces were collected which a reasonable criticism could praise wholly without reserve, they would make only a very small volume. But an extraordinary proportion would come from *Urn Burial*—a proportion higher than any other work of equal length would yield, possibly higher than could be gleaned even from the longest works.

The value of Browne now lies wholly in his style. In no other case is the style more emphatically the man, in none other is the attempt to sever substance from form more hopeless, or more unjust, where, in the most partial way, it can be done. The thought of Browne is in many points open to question. In *Vulgar Errors* he is divided between credulity and scepticism. He has no clue to guide him through the mazes of false opinion. There is little ground for surprise in the fact that some of his contemporaries saw only the scepticism; for their faith expressed itself in a series of propositions, and Browne doubted some of them. It is more astonishing that there have been moderns also who regarded him as sceptical in mind. Coleridge saw deeper, and rightly ranked him as "an Ultra-fidian." Hence Browne's acceptance of Tertullian's

"credo, quia impossibile est." He has a vein of superstition, and believes in magic and witchcraft. In the latter case unfortunately his was more than a passive belief; for as late as 1664 he was partly instrumental in bringing about the death of two wretched women charged with this crime. But when all this has been admitted, and the utmost has been said that can be said against Browne as a philosopher and a man of science, the value of his best work remains exactly the same. Reasoning cannot touch that paragraph on oblivion, any more than all the syllogisms since Aristotle can either lessen or increase the beauty of Beethoven's music. The appeal of music is to another range of being, a different faculty than that which the syllogism addresses. So too Browne's appeal is to the emotions rather than to the reason. Not what he asserts, but what he suggests, is important. *Urn Burial* proves nothing, any more than *Paradise Lost* does. But just as *Paradise Lost* kindles and elevates the imagination, so does *Urn Burial.*

Great as were Browne's services to literature, they were not without drawback. The vice of learning is pedantry, and Browne had his share of it. In some forms it is harmless enough. If we get weary of the quincunx we cease to read *The Garden of Cyrus*, and there is an end. Browne was not the first pedant, and had he never written there would probably have been not one pedant less after him. But it was different with his choice of words. All who could judge perceived him to be a master of style, and some tried to imitate him. Unfortunately, in his case, as in many another, the faults proved to be more easily reproduced than the beauties. Hence the judgment of Coleridge, which, harsh as it seems, is nevertheless sound: "Sir Thomas Browne it was who, though a writer of great genius, first effectually injured the literary taste of the nation by his introduction of learned words, merely because they were learned." Johnson again speaks of

Browne's style as "a tissue of many languages;" and Johnson himself is said by Boswell to have based his style on Browne.) But Johnson's Latinisms were moderate compared with Browne's. Words like ergotism, volutation, funambulatory, innitency, orbity, show a perverse love of the word, not on its merits but for its outlandishness. Herein undoubtedly Browne set an example of the worst kind, and the evil he thus did has to be set in the balance against his services. But in this case at least the Shakespearean rule is reversed. The evil Browne did was not indeed interred with his bones, but it has gradually grown less. The good sense of the English people rejected the needless coinages. (The value of Browne as a model for musical prose is perennial.) Few would be capable of directly following him, but many have, even unconsciously, written more melodious English because he had written before them.

Kinship with Felltham is shown by Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon (1609-1674), whose *Contemplations and Reflections upon the Psalms of David* are virtually a collection of essays, full of the reflections of a man rich in experience and wise from contemplation,—a man also genuinely good in heart, or else singularly skilful in concealing evil. Clarendon's *Essays, Divine and Moral* deserve to be better known than they are. They have a considerable range. *Of the Reverence due to Antiquity* is a very able essay. It is written in a sceptical spirit and gives a high opinion of Clarendon's historical acumen. Perhaps the best of all is the essay *Of Peace*, which is coloured by Clarendon's experiences, and reminiscent, though not obtrusively so, of the civil troubles. Its fervour, rare in Clarendon, is obviously inspired by a lively recollection of the horrors of war. The beginning, like the beginning of several of the other essays, recalls Bacon: "It was a very proper answer to him who asked, Why any man should be delighted with beauty? that it was a question that none but a blind man

could ask; since any beautiful object doth so much attract the sight, that it is in no man's power not to be pleased with it." Clarendon's sentences, however, have not the weighty sententiousness of Bacon's; on the contrary, the vice of his style is that they are apt to be at times far too long and loosely constructed.

The personal note which is characteristic of all these writers connects them with Montaigne rather than with Bacon. But more deliberately than any of them Abraham Cowley (1618–1667) cultivated a form of essay more intimate and confidential, though less profound, weighty and philosophical, than the Baconian. The style is less elaborate than Drummond's or Browne's. It is a form of the essay which can be traced, with intervals of partial oblivion, from Cowley's day to this; and in it have written the best-beloved, even if they be not the greatest, of all the essayists—Addison, Lamb, Thackeray, R. L. Stevenson. To have taken one of the longest steps towards this result is perhaps Cowley's best title to fame.

The whole of Cowley's prose would fill but a very slender volume. It was his misfortune to live in an age of civil convulsion. He was torn from the university "by that violent public storm which would suffer nothing to stand where it did, but rooted up every plant, even from the princely cedars to me, the hyssop;" and in his opinion "a warlike, various, and tragical age is best to write *of*, but worst to write *in*." It was his further misfortune to be early accepted as not merely a poet, but the greatest poet of his time, though Milton was a contemporary. To modern critical taste, no judgment seems more surprising than this. But naturally enough Cowley accepted it; and the consequence is that his admirable prose is limited to a mere handful of prefaces and discourses. The charm of these is largely due to their simple and sincere revelation of self. They are the friendly chat of a thoughtful and reflective spectator of life. Nothing Cowley has written is

more delightful than what he has written directly about himself. It is natural to turn for illustration to the essay *Of Myself*—perhaps the finest of his compositions. But whatever be the subject—whether greatness, or gardens, or solitude, or the dangers of an honest man in much company—Cowley loves to write in the first person; and his third person is but a little way removed from it. He is far happier in this mood than in the more ambitious 'vision' concerning the government of Cromwell.

Complete success in Cowley's particular form of essay is hardly compatible with greatness of the highest kind. "The solemn peaks but to the stars are known;" and here there is presupposed a certain familiarity and intimacy of relation with the reader. Cowley had just the proper gifts and the right disposition. He was retiring and unambitious. He compares himself with Montaigne in respect of his indifference to greatness. "I confess I love littleness almost in all things. A little convenient estate, a little cheerful house, a little company, and a very little feast; and if I were ever to fall in love again (which is a great passion, and therefore I hope I have done with it[1]) it would be, I think, with prettiness rather than with majestical beauty. I would neither wish that my mistress, nor my fortune, should be a *bona roba*, nor, as Homer used to describe his beauties, like a daughter of great Jupiter, for the stateliness and largeness of her person, but, as Lucretius says, 'Parvula, pumilio, Χαρίτων μία, tota merum sal.'" "As far as my memory can return back into my past life, before I knew, or was capable of guessing, what the world, or glories, or business of it were, the natural affections of my soul gave me a secret bent of aversion from them, as some plants are said to turn away from others by an antipathy imperceptible to themselves and inscrutable to man's under-

[1] Remembering the chronicle of the names of his mistresses, the reader may echo the hope.

standing. Even when I was a young boy at school, instead of running about on holidays and playing with my fellows, I was wont to steal from them and walk into the fields, either alone with a book, or with some one companion, if I could find any of the same temper."

This is not the temperament of the man who is born to move the world, either by the energy of his action or by the profundity and originality of his thought. The enthusiasm of a Napoleon and of an Aristotle alike is stirred by that greatness to which Cowley deliberately prefers littleness. But this *is* the temperament of the born essayist; and it is because they display it with an easy grace that Cowley's essays preserve a perennial charm. Though his poetical reputation is gone, as an essayist his position is sure.

Another development is best exemplified by the *Epistolæ Ho-Elianæ*. These are in form not essays at all; but of all the writings of the time, except Cowley's, they have most of the spirit of the essay; and they surpass even Cowley's in their power of illustrating the Addisonian essay, for they are far more varied than Cowley's essays. The Queen Anne essayists felt the kinship, and it is interesting to notice that there is in *The Spectator* a paper by Howell.

James Howell (1594?–1666) was a man of more diversified activity than any of the essayists hitherto considered, excepting Bacon. If, as may be suspected, he was something of a busybody, this failing makes him all the more effective as a miscellaneous writer. Like Cowley he was on the Royalist side. For a time he suffered imprisonment, but he was released in 1651, and on the Restoration he received some recompense for his sufferings in the office of Historiographer Royal.

Of all Howell's voluminous compositions only the *Epistolæ* can be said still to live. They are described as familiar letters domestic and foreign, partly historical, political, philosophical,

"upon emergent occasions." They were published in four books between 1645 and 1655. On the threshold a question arises as to the authenticity of the letters—not their authenticity as the work of Howell; that is undisputed; but their claim to be accepted as compositions written at the time when they profess to have been written, and addressed to the persons with whom the author represents himself as corresponding. This question is vital to the historian; but it is less important from the purely literary point of view, and it must suffice here to state in the briefest way the conclusion of experts. It is that very many of the letters are, in the sense indicated, certainly spurious, and that the historical value of the whole collection is small.

As pieces of literature, however, the *Epistolæ Ho-Elianæ* cannot be so summarily dismissed. The fact that the letters were in Howell's own day, and for about half a century after his death, extremely popular, is *prima facie* evidence of merit; and the further fact that the popularity has never been entirely lost greatly strengthens the presumption. The secret is not hard to find. Howell aimed at popularity, he had the knack of selecting interesting subjects, and the fact that he had no scruples about authenticity made his task all the easier. As a writer, he was not a great master of style. The grand eloquence of Milton was altogether beyond his reach. He could never have rivalled the harmonies of Browne; nor could he have written with the keen wit of Earle. But for all that Howell's style has very considerable, and indeed, having regard to the purposes he had in view, very great merits. He can be familiar and easy, rapid and clear in narrative, humorous or pathetic, or terse and pointed. His brief letter to his cousin Rowland Gwin shows no small power to turn a phrase: "Cousin, I was lately sorry, and I was lately glad, that I heard you were ill, that I heard you are well." His sentences are simple in structure: in this respect, as in

many others, he is a forerunner of the Queen Anne essayists. He has shed completely those poetical elements which are alternately the highest grace and the worst fault in the prose-writings of his contemporaries. He addresses himself to the understanding, and rarely fails to make himself intelligible.

There are not many devices for securing popularity with which Howell does not show himself familiar. He has been spoken of as a journalist before the time of journalists; and few of his successors have equalled him in this essential of their art. His "bill of fare" is piquantly varied. The very names of his correspondents are attractive. Even to the present day, notwithstanding the doubts cast upon their trustworthiness, a special interest attaches to letters which purport to be addressed to Charles I., Ben Jonson, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, Buckingham, Sir Kenelm Digby, Archbishop Usher and Wentworth (Lord Strafford). There is attraction too in the variety of theme. The letters range from philosophy and the affairs of state to the most trivial gossip of the hour. One group is devoted to the religions and another to the languages of the world. The Hanseatic league is the subject of one epistle; another gives a vivid description of the assassination of Buckingham. The condition of the Jews, the Inquisition, witches, the habitation of the moon, are all within Howell's range. A large number of letters are filled with news, domestic and foreign. When more solid matter fails him, Howell enlivens his correspondent with an anecdote. To Ben Jonson he addresses a variant on Boccaccio's story of the pot of basil. He feeds the appetite for the marvellous with a tale of a white bird fluttering about the bed of the dying.

From this it is obvious to how great an extent, in all but form, Howell anticipated the periodical essayists. They too were newsmongers, though the purveying of intelligence soon became a subordinate phase of their activity. They too

ranged over a field whose boundaries were set only by their own ingenuity. The *proportions* of the ingredients in the mixture differ. Howell is much more political than the Queen Anne writers, and they give closer attention than he to the minor morals, to fashions and the like. But many of the *Epistolæ Ho-Elianæ* might be mentioned which are just in the manner of Addison or of Steele. Such is the story of Captain Bolea and the sudden whitening of his hair. Such too are the letter to Captain Thomas B , and the "rambling meditations" of Book II., 50.

Though some of the writers who have been mentioned were not uninfluenced by the spirit of party politics, still their atmosphere is widely different from that of the political pamphlet. Compositions of that class are rarely literature; but, were it only for the sake of the *Areopagitica*, they cannot be ignored. The political pamphlet proper has little in common with the political essays of Bacon. These are really essays on questions not of party or of the hour, but of the welfare of states. The author is a philosopher, not a controversialist. The accentuation of differences during the reign of Charles I. made the philosophic attitude difficult, and powerfully furthered the development of the controversial spirit. Much of the talent which in quieter times would have been devoted to art was given up to party, and the masses of pamphlets which are to be found in all great libraries were the result. The bulk of them are merely the raw material of history. The majority even of Milton's tracts might without great loss to literature be forgotten, were it not that they are documents in the history and evidences of the character of Milton. There are, it is true, here and there passages of a grandeur which we have learnt to qualify by the writer's name—Miltonic; and there is at least one invaluable *revelation of the inner soul of the poet* It is that well-known passage in the *Apology for Smectymnuus*, where he tells how

he became convinced that he who would write well "ought himself to be a true poem." But what the other tracts are only here and there one, the *Areopagitica*, is as a whole. In form a speech, this great outpouring of a heroic soul is in essence an essay. Magnificent as it is, it is far from faultless. No one either before or since has used the English language in prose more majestically than Milton. But in prose he is not the assured master of style that he is in verse. The periodic style which was characteristic of the age is, in his handling of it, sometimes heavy and obscure: only in a few inspired passages does he overcome the difficulties of a prose style as yet imperfectly formed. But what distinguishes the *Areopagitica* from the other prose writings of Milton is not so much that the finest passages are finer than any in them, as that the whole piece is lofty in thought. Elsewhere, we have sometimes to regret that Milton wrote as he did: in the *Areopagitica* he is never unworthy of himself. For two centuries and a half it has remained the classical defence of liberty of thought; and though, for the time, the victory of the cause Milton fought for seems assured, the day may again come when this dauntless champion may be needed to inspire a new battle. Tyranny may be exercised by a multitude as well as by an individual. In the latter case there is always an ultimate remedy, for the many are stronger than the one: in the former case the remedy is less easily found. To argue that democracy is founded on the principle of liberty and is therefore incompatible with tyranny, is unconvincing. The Christian Church s founded on the conception of the immeasurable importance f the individual soul, and the individual's responsibility for ; and yet one of the hardest battles ever fought by humanity as fought to secure that soul from the tyranny of an external wer, the Popedom. The battle of freedom may have to be ght again, and, if it has, the *Areopagitica* will become, not rely an interesting landmark of history and a glorious piece

of eloquence, but a possession of practical value and importance. The 'organ voice' of Milton will not easily be drowned.

While the merely political pamphlet does not concern us, there were, after Milton, two writers who were at once politicians and men of letters, and whose writings helped forward the development of the essay. These were Sir William Temple (1628-1699), and one less famous in literature, but far greater alike as writer and as politician—George Savile, Lord Halifax[1] (1633-1695). In respect of literary reputation, there are few men who are so far from having their deserts as the great Trimmer. In spite of the panegyric of Macaulay, he still remains merely a name to nearly all except those who are students of history as well as of literature; and though Miss Foxcroft's scholarly edition has done something for his fame, and the more recent one by Sir Walter Raleigh will doubtless do more, they are still few who know how admirably he wrote. It is merely the name of *The Character of a Trimmer* that is generally known. Yet this famous essay is almost as masterly in style as it is in thought. It is political, but with that detachment of mind which leaves it still a treasure of literature. It is often witty, and sometimes eloquent. For political wisdom it would be hard to find its equal outside Burke. The noble passage on truth has been quoted as a specimen of Halifax's style, and none better could be selected. But he is not a writer of purple patches. All through the essay is profound in thought, as well as carefully written. Memorable sayings are frequent and pungent ones occasional: "Monarchy is liked by the people for the bells and tinsel, the outward pomp and gilding; and there must be milk for babes, since the greatest part of mankind are and ever will be in that list." 'He that feareth God only because there is an Hell, must wish there were no God; and he that feareth a King only because he can punish, must wish there

were no King," has, as Mr. Herbert Paul points out, a smack of Bacon. So has this: "He [the Prince] must not only be the first mover, and the fountain from whence all the great acts of state originally flow, but he must be thought so too by his people, that they may preserve their veneration for him."

As an answer to the gross and absurd attacks of partisans upon Halifax this essay is conclusive. Naturally Halifax advocates the philosophy of the mean; a trimmer, if he be honest, *is* a trimmer just because he is in the mean. And to Halifax the political mean is that which lies between the two "barbarous extremes" of monarchy and commonwealth, both unrestricted. This is a type of philosophy which discourages enthusiasm; but on two or three points Halifax is enthusiastic, and his warmth gives life and vigour to the essay. "Our Trimmer adoreth the goddess truth" is the beginning of his most eloquent paragraph. The conception of law inspires him with a similar fervour. Laws, he says, "are to mankind that the sun is to plants." His patriotism is more fervid still. The Trimmer, he says, "doth not worship the sun, because it is not peculiar to us; it rambleth about the world, and is less kind to us than it is to other countries. But for the earth of England, though perhaps inferior to that of many places abroad, to him there is divinity in it, and he would rather die than see a spire of English grass trampled down by a foreign trespasser."

The same profound reverence for law, combined with hatred and dread of Papacy, inspires the two essays which rank next in importance, *A Letter to a Dissenter* and *The Anatomy of an Equivalent*. The former, which was written on the occasion of the Declaration of Indulgence, earnestly insists upon the danger of accepting a violation of law as a favour. In the latter, the 'equivalent' was the proposal by Papists of "Some mighty *nobody knows what*" which should make Protestantism as secure as the penal laws made it. The essay

is a masterly examination, and rejection, of the idea. The fact that Halifax was opposed to the 'equivalent' is itself a weighty reason against it, for few men have ever been by nature more free from bigotry. His deep dislike and distrust of Romanism had its root in statesmanship, not in sectarianism.

These tracts are the greatest of Halifax's writings, but the most charming is *The Lady's New Year's Gift, or, Advice to a Daughter*. It is also that in which he approaches nearest in spirit to the essayists of the eighteenth century. While there are here and there passages of wit and sarcasm, it is natural that in a composition addressed to his own daughter the salient characteristics should be goodness of heart and tenderness of feeling. It is warm with the love of a most affectionate father, and luminous with the wisdom of an exceptionally wise one. This delightful letter was the most popular of all the compositions of Halifax. Though the age of the Restoration is not credited with a large share of the domestic virtues, these virtues are never obsolete, and Halifax spoke to the heart of the best of his countrymen.

The merit of Temple was both less than and different in kind from that of Halifax. He too was master of a fine style, but he was far more diffuse than Halifax, and incapable of reaching the lofty height to which the latter occasionally soared. There was a world of difference between the intellects of the two men. Halifax was essentially a philosopher, Temple was helpless in the handling of abstract ideas. The *Essay upon the Original and Nature of Government* is the work of a man who has neither the scholarship nor the speculative power necessary for the treatment of the subject. The deficiencies of the essay *Of Ancient and Modern Learning* have been sufficiently exposed by Macaulay. Perhaps they have been exaggerated; but when he points out that among the great English writers whom Temple fails to mention are

Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton, it is evident that there can be no effective defence. The Temple of literature is seen, however, not in such ambitious compositions as these, but in the essays *Of Gardening* and *Of Health and Long Life*—easy and gossipy compositions, very discursive and somewhat diffuse, but always pleasant. The former contains a famous commendation of the climate of England, which Temple quotes as having been uttered by the king: "He thought that was the best climate where he could be abroad in the air with pleasure, or at least without trouble and inconvenience, the most days of the year and the most hours of the day." The latter reveals the secret why, though Temple is inferior to Halifax as a writer, and unworthy to be even named with him as a thinker, he nevertheless comes closer than Halifax to the central citadel of the essay. "I have chosen those subjects of these essays," he says, "wherein I take human life to be most concerned, and which are of most common use and most necessary knowledge; and wherein, though I may not be able to inform men more than they know, yet I may perhaps give them the occasion to consider more than they do." The principle of selection is just that which guided Steele. Like Steele, Temple is confidential; he unfolds the stores of his memory and mingles them with the incidents of his daily life. The reminiscences of the retired statesman are interspersed among the trivial reflections and observations of the country gentleman. Even Temple's failings and limitations are rather helpful than hurtful. He is vain, but his vanity is harmless and good-natured, and it banishes all tendency to reserve. He shows a pleasant equability of mind which, to the essayist, is perhaps a more valuable gift than the force of a Swift. His own story of his three wishes throws a flood of light upon him. They were health, and peace, and fair weather; "which," he justly adds, "though out of the way among young men, yet perhaps

might pass well enough among old." They are precisely the wishes that the Ulysses of Plato's myth of Er would have framed. This combination of innate love of the quiet life with experience of the great world of courts and council-rooms constitutes the peculiar charm of Temple.

As the volume of miscellaneous essays swelled during the seventeenth century from the small beginnings of the Elizabethan period, so did the stream of critical essays. But few will dispute the justice of Professor Saintsbury's judgment, that between Jonson's *Timber* and Dryden's *Essay* there is nothing substantive save Davenant's letter and Hobbes's reply. Within the life of Dryden, however, there was one other critical writer who deserves more attention than he has hitherto received. This was Robert Wolseley, whose preface to Rochester's *Valentinian* (1685) is a strikingly able and well-written argument to prove that the question of morality is irrelevant to criticism. Jonson's *Timber* has been dealt with elsewhere, and Davenant and Hobbes and Wolseley are of little note in the history of the development of the essay. It is otherwise with Dryden; for he is not only the sole critic, down to his own time, who is fit to be compared with Sidney and Jonson, but he is the man who took perhaps the greatest single step towards the modernisation of English prose style.

In the case of Dryden (1631–1700) prose ran along with verse through the greater part of his literary life. From the *Epistle Dedicatory of the Rival Ladies* (1664) to the *Preface to the Fables* (1700) in discourses, apologies, defences, prefaces, dedications and postscripts, Dryden was continually enunciating and buttressing the critical principles which he believed to underlie his own work and the work of other poets. The mass of his prose work is in the aggregate considerable, and its importance is great. Among the earliest of his essays was *Of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), which is still the best known, and

contains the most elaborate exposition of his critical principles, though it is surpassed in interest by the admirable *Preface to the Fables.*[1] The dialogue *Of Dramatic Poesy* was occasioned by the preface to Sir Robert Howard's *Four new Plays*, in which Howard undertook to answer the defence of rhyme in the *Epistle Dedicatory of the Rival Ladies;* but, though it is thus a document in a controversy, its thorough urbanity and dispassionate reasoning give it the value of a substantive work. Howard himself appears as one of the interlocutors; but he did not enjoy the position and answered in the preface to *The Duke of Lerma* in a tone which drew from Dryden a *Defence* of the essay much sharper and more controversial than the dialogue. Naturally, therefore, it is of far less value. It shows fine gifts of keen satire and effective retort, but for critical principles we must turn to the essay itself. That is far from confining itself to the question of rhyme. The general principles of dramatic construction, the unities, the art of linking scene to scene, the differences between ancients and moderns, English and French, are all discussed with admirable balance of judgment as well as independence. In respect of the last quality it is difficult for a modern reader to do Dryden full justice. Like all his contemporaries, he is hampered by the 'rules,' and is fully himself only when he flings them aside, or diverges into some by-path where there are no rules to obstruct him. Yet even within the limits of the most authoritative rules there is enough independence to justify Professor Ker's description of him as "sceptical, tentative, disengaged, where most of his contemporaries, and most of his successors for a hundred years, are pledged to certain dogmas and principles."[2] He accepts the unities, it is true, but it is with reservations and on reasoned principles; and he will not admit the superiority either of the ancients or of the French. He puts into the mouth of Eugenius (Sackville) some excellent remarks in

praise of the powerful scenes of passion in Shakespeare and Fletcher, and in his own person, as Neander, he pronounces a striking eulogy on the intermingling of tragedy with comedy. He "cannot but conclude, to the honour of our nation, that we have invented, increased, and perfected a more pleasant way of writing for the stage, than was ever known to the ancients or moderns of any nation, which is tragi-comedy." A similar independence of judgment is shown in the excellent comparison, in the *Preface to the Fables*, between Chaucer and Ovid. "The vulgar judges, which are nine parts in ten of all nations, who call conceits and jingles wit, who see Ovid full of them, and Chaucer altogether without them, will think me little less than mad for preferring the Englishman to the Roman. Yet, with their leave, I must presume to say, that the things they admire are only glittering trifles, and so far from being witty, that in a serious poem they are nauseous, because they are unnatural."

Dryden's understanding was one of the most sound and masculine that have ever been applied to criticism, and where he trusts it he writes admirably. No one ever with a firmer hand brushed aside the unessential. This is conspicuously seen in his treatment of the charge of plagiarism in the *Preface to An Evening's Love* (1671). He adduces excellent examples, of Virgil, Shakespeare, etc., and then by a few well-judged remarks reduces the charge to precisely its proper dimensions. "The employment of the poet is like that of a curious gunsmith, or watchmaker: the iron or silver is not his own; but they are the least part of that which gives the value; the price lies wholly in the workmanship." But sometimes Dryden's judgment was warped, as it probably was by patriotism when he pronounced Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* "perhaps not much inferior to the *Ilias*, or the *Æneis*." And sometimes he did not trust his judgment. We must not look in Dryden for unwavering consistency. From time to

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time he falls back on the rules which he has almost made up his mind to disregard, and then he seems to unsay his own wisest maxims. In the *Preface to Troilus and Cressida* (1679) (which he believes to be probably one of Shakespeare's "first endeavours on the stage") he is much fettered by this obsession. Speaking of the plots of Shakespeare and Fletcher he says that "we ought to follow them so far only as they have copied the excellencies of those who invented and brought to perfection Dramatic Poetry; those things only excepted, which religion, custom of countries, idioms of languages, etc., have altered in the superstructures, but not in the foundation of the design." From this it would seem that the whole structure of the drama is fixed and unalterable. But to interpret Dryden so is to take from him all meaning, and it is preferable to say that for the moment he yielded to the weight of authority and was inconsistent with himself.

It is, however, in the *Preface to the Fables* that we get not only Dryden's most vivid and energetic criticism, but a unique revelation of his person. It is written with extraordinary spirit and brightness, and is still one of the best pieces of criticism in English. Here Dryden casts aside all the *impedimenta* of rules, writes exactly as he feels, and conquers the reader by the force of his strong intelligence. He makes no attempt at system. "The nature of a preface is rambling, never wholly out of the way, nor in it. This I have learned from the practice of honest Montaigne." He is confidential. This *Preface* contains at the close the frank yet dignified plea of guilty to many of the charges brought by Jeremy Collier, and an expression of contrition. It is personal also in other and lighter ways. He speaks to the reader as an old man, and tells him his own conception of the state of his faculties: "I think myself as vigorous as ever in the faculties of my soul, excepting only my memory, which is not impaired to any great degree; and if I lose not more of it, I

have no great reason to complain. What judgment I had, increases rather than diminishes; and thoughts, such as they are, come crowding in so fast upon me, that my only difficulty is to choose or to reject, to run them into verse, or to give them the other harmony of prose: I have so long studied and practised both, that they are grown into a habit, and become familiar to me." There is much besides in Dryden that sweeps the reader along with the sense of power, but nowhere else, probably, does he feel so much love of the writer.

It is clear that the author of the passages quoted had studied "the other harmony of prose" to some purpose, and the impression these extracts give is greatly strengthened by a reading in full of the essays from which they come. The thought Dryden gave to the principles of composition bore good fruit in his own case. He is the first master of a prose which is adapted to the everyday needs of expression, and yet has dignity enough to rise to any point short of the topmost peaks of eloquence. Certainly the instrument Dryden forged is capable of producing no effect equal to that produced by Milton and Sir Thomas Browne in their finest passages. But then, Milton when uninspired is often clumsy in his prose, and Sir Thomas Browne's neologisms and 'aureate terms' are ill-fitted for ordinary ends. The great merit of Dryden is that his style would have suited Solomon when he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall. No style written before is comparable to it in range. Its characteristics are lucidity and easy grace. It flows on apparently without effort and with that perfect art which conceals art. But it is art, not chance. Evidently Dryden deliberately steered clear of the Scylla and Charybdis on one or other of which nearly all his predecessors were apt to strike. The eloquent passages of Milton's prose he would have judged to be adapted rather to the harmony of verse; and he has placed on record, in precise

terms, his judgment of those conceits which were the bane of literature, both in verse and in prose, in the period immediately before his own day. He is speaking of verse, but the principle applies equally to prose: "As for the turn of words, in which Ovid particularly excels all poets, they are sometimes a fault, and sometimes a beauty, as they are used properly or improperly; but in strong passions always to be shunned, because passions are serious, and will admit no playing." Now character-writing rested almost wholly on this turn of words; and when he adopted this view about "the turn of words" Dryden rejected the style which it encouraged. He saw two deviations from what he would have called nature. It was a deviation to conceal meaning under verbal quibbles and by excessive condensation; it was equally a deviation to conceal it in the maze of long involved sentences. The first business of prose was to convey a plain meaning unmistakably; and this was best done by a style based upon that of conversation, yet differing from it as the permanent will differ from the temporary and the studied from the spontaneous. Such seem to be the principles that underlie the prose style of Dryden.

CHAPTER V

THE QUEEN ANNE ESSAYISTS

In the fulness of time the periodical essay was born of the brain of Richard Steele (1672–1729). Of course there had been anticipations. Attention has already been drawn to certain analogies between Cowley's essays and the *Epistolæ Ho-Elianæ* on the one hand, and *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* on the other; but notwithstanding these, this most characteristic of the literary forms of the Queen Anne period was, in quite an exceptional measure, the creation of one mind. Daniel Defoe (1661?–1731) has sometimes been described as the predecessor of Steele, and no doubt Steele did take hints from Defoe. The association of the two men at this point is interesting. Though both were good writers, neither of them can be ranked with the greatest; but in one respect—power of origination—they are hardly equalled in their own period, or surpassed in the whole history of English literature. To Defoe, as a pioneer in journalism as well as in the novel, the palm in this respect must be awarded; but an injustice has sometimes been done to Steele by exaggerating Defoe's influence on the periodical essay. It is perfectly true that the germ of that literary form is to be found in Defoe's *Review*; but the *Review* contains little more than the germ. If the essayist may be distinguished from the journalist and the political pamphleteer, Defoe was, as essayist, more the disciple than the master of Steele. As essayist, his fame must rest principally on the two volumes of miscellaneous writings disinterred from forgotten journals by his biographer,

William Lee; and the contents of these volumes range from the year 1716 to 1729, after both *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* had run their course.

Of all the literary men of the eighteenth century Defoe was perhaps the most extraordinary. To call his life a romance would be to misuse the word, for at every point the great realist touched the hardest reality. But, if not romantic, his life was certainly strange and unusual in the extreme, and in his case even the hardest reality could, on occasion, take a tinge of romance. He stood in the pillory, not to be pelted with rotten eggs and dead cats, but guarded by an admiring crowd and crowned with flowers. Such was the punishment and the reward for *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*, when at last its real meaning came home to churchmen and to dissenters alike. Defoe's own words, in the preface to the eighth volume of the *Review*, best describe his life:—"I have gone through a life of wonders, and am the subject of a vast variety of providences; I have been fed more by miracle than Elija, when the ravens were his purveyors; I have some time ago summ'd up the scenes of my life in this distich:

> *No man has tasted differing fortunes* more,
> *And thirteen times I have been* rich *and* poor.

In the school of affliction I have learnt more philosophy than at the academy, and more divinity than from the pulpit: In prison I had learnt to know that liberty does not consist in open doors, and the free egress and regress of locomotion. I have seen the rough side of the world as well as the smooth, and have in less than half a year tasted the difference between the closet of a king and the dungeon of Newgate."

It is, fortunately, not necessary here to enter upon the complicated story of Defoe's life. Few of the tasks of the biographer are harder. There is room for the widest differences of opinion, from Minto's (which, however, is given with

important qualifications), that "he was a great, a truly great liar, perhaps the greatest liar that ever lived," to that of his best biographer, Lee, who pronounces him to have been one of the "most truly consistent of English authors." We need deal with Defoe's life only as it illustrates his writings, and in particular those writings which may be classed as essays.

Defoe was too strenuous a man of affairs to have the temperament of the essayist. Of his astonishingly voluminous miscellaneous writings by far the greater part belongs to the class of political pamphlets, or is merely ephemeral journalism. And yet there remains a residuum of the essay character which most men would have needed a lifetime to write. Take for example the *Review*. Though the great bulk of it is journalistic, or is raw material for the historian, there still remains an appreciable part which belongs to the domain of letters. There are few things in literature more astonishing than Defoe's *Review of the Affairs of France*. Though the belief that Defoe was, when he began it, a prisoner in Newgate has recently been shown to be mistaken, its successful prosecution for more than nine years was an unparalleled literary feat. There are over 5000 pages of the *Review*, all written by the hand of Defoe; and yet, according to Lee, he found time during those same years to write "no less than eighty other distinct works, containing 4727 pages." The *Review* itself is little known, because it is almost inaccessible: there is said to be only one complete copy in existence. But the general plan has been repeatedly explained. At first the *Review* appeared weekly, then twice, and later still thrice a week. Its principal purpose was to bring before the English people the thoughts of Defoe on international politics and then on commerce. The principles which ought to guide a nation's foreign policy do not change so rapidly; and for the exposition of these the man who had

been the confidential servant of King William was well equipped. There is no reason to doubt that Defoe was honest in intention and patriotic in spirit. That he frequently startled and shocked his readers by highly-coloured descriptions of the power and greatness of France is no evidence to the contrary; for he argued with force that the people needed to be startled, and that the true patriot was he who roused them from their excessive confidence.

With all this portion of the *Review*, however, we have little to do. It is a vast collection of articles which are essays in the same sense as the leaders of a modern newspaper are essays. The point at which the *Review* touches the periodical essay proper is in the section called the *Mercure Scandale; or Advice from the Scandalous Club;* which is further described as being "a weekly history of Nonsense, Impertinence, Vice, and Debauchery." Such it was at the beginning; but before the *Review* was a year old this section became a monthly supplement. Later still it was separated from the main portion and distinguished by the title of *The Little Review.* Thus, in the *Review*, the element of news ousts gossip and moral criticism; while *The Tatler* followed a line of development precisely contrary. The difference is highly significant. On the whole the *Scandalous Club* is of no great literary value. Here and there we come upon vigorous essays on the vices and follies of society, on the minor morals, and sometimes on the great virtues and vices. But many of the papers have lost their flavour, the wit is often forced, and there is a want of the human touches which give charm to *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. Great as were his gifts, Defoe had not that lightness of touch which distinguished Steele and Addison, and is almost essential to this type of essay.

The *Review* as it then existed was brought to an end in 1712 by the imposition of that stamp tax which ruined one half of Grub Street; but immediately a new series on a reduced scale

was started, and this was carried on till June of the following year. For more than a hundred years it was believed that Defoe's political career ended in 1715, but in 1864 his biographer Lee came upon evidence that this belief was mistaken. Following up the clue he found that from 1716 to 1729 Defoe had been an active contributor to various journals; and the result of his researches was the publication of two volumes of miscellaneous writings, including "more than three hundred and fifty Essays and Letters, moral and religious—imaginative,—humorous,—amatory,—ironical, and miscellaneous." The two papers to which Defoe contributed most copiously were *Mist's Journal* and *Applebee's Journal*. His connexion with the former throws a curious light upon his enigmatical character; for Mist was a Jacobite, and among the Jacobite associates of the *Journal* were men like Atterbury and Bolingbroke. While he was a fellow-contributor with these men Defoe was secretly in the pay of the Government, and was doing his best to thwart the ends which the *Journal* was meant to serve. Such were the crooked courses which he conceived himself to be at liberty to take for a good end.

We are however concerned with the literary aspects of these essays, rather than with the moral question which arises from their appearance where the discoverer found them; and their special point of interest is the evidence they afford that if Defoe gave a hint to Steele he also took hints from him. Many of the essays in *Mist* and *Applebee* are of types rendered familiar by *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, but hardly to be found in English before the appearance of these periodicals. Thus, the excellent character of Tom Oaken Plant, from *Mist's Journal*, is close akin to the character sketches of *The Spectator*. So too the caution of Lionel Lye-alone against love and the admirable essay on quacks are exactly in the spirit of *The Spectator*. *Applebee's Journal* contains a paper most skilfully worked out from the conception of the secrets

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of the human heart revealed as the working of bees is revealed by a glass hive. The mere description of the plan again betrays the kinship.

But while there is much in these periodicals that is suggestive of and was probably suggested by *The Spectator*, there is more still that is pure Defoe. The extraordinary variety of subject is characteristic (*Applebee*, for example, contains an essay on cryptography). The articles on party government and on the South Sea Company in *Applebee's Journal* would have been out of place in the periodicals conducted by Addison and Steele, and so would the powerful ironical essay on the clemency of the Czar in *Mist's Journal*. Equally alien would have been those articles in *Applebee* in August and September, 1720, which may be described as a first sketch of the *Religious Courtship*, or that character-sketch in the same journal out of which sprang *Moll Flanders*.

There is much ephemeral stuff in these essays, for no man could maintain uniform excellence along with such speed and volume of production as Defoe's. He wrote for the day, and great part of what he wrote is no longer worth preserving. But while this must be admitted, it is also true that both in the *Review* and in Lee's collection there is not a little good and some admirable work. If Defoe's essays were accessible, and if the gold were separated from the dross, he would take a high place among a class of writers with whom until recent years he has hardly been associated at all. His masterpiece is the grand essay on *The Instability of Human Greatness*, which was suggested by the funeral of the Duke of Marlborough. That there was something in the subject which drew out the best that Defoe had to give is indicated by the grave eloquence of the reflections on death which appeared in the same journal (*Applebee*) about three years later. Nothing greater than the former, probably nothing so forcible, is to be found in Steele or Addison. Only Shakespeare and Oliver Wendell Holmes

have pointed the same moral with equal skill. Defoe borrows from the former; the latter had never seen Defoe's essay, but the conclusion of his description of the race of life is exactly in its spirit: "Race over. All that are on the course are coming in at a walk; no more running. Who is ahead? Ahead? What! and the winning-post a slab of white or grey stone standing out from that turf where there is no more jockeying or straining for victory!"

Of course Defoe could not fail to observe the kinship between his *Review* and *The Tatler*, and he expressed his pleasure at seeing the society honoured "by the succession of the Venerable Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq." But the difference between the two periodicals was evident from the first, and grew conspicuous as time passed. It was due to a difference of design, accentuated by a contrast in character between the two writers. They were unlike in their failings as well as in their merits. In the case of Steele, both merits and defects bore the stamp of his country and blood. That he was typically Irish was noticed by contemporaries. Dennis declared that Steele had testimony to the genuineness of his Irish pedigree more authentic than any human testimony; "for God has marked him more abundantly than he did Cain, and stamped his native country on his face, his understanding, his writings, his actions, his passions, and, above all, his vanity." Johnson believed that Steele "practised the lighter vices." In more recent times Macaulay has insisted upon the defects, and Thackeray, without disguising these, has set the virtues in an engaging light to all readers of *Esmond* and *The English Humourists*. Perhaps both sides of the truth are by none so well presented as by Theophilus Cibber, who declares Steele to have been "the most agreeable, and if we may be allowed the expression, the most innocent rake that ever trod the rounds of indulgence." Steele knew his own failings, though he was powerless to cure them; and

he was doubtless consciously painting his own portrait in his picture of the rake in No. 27 of *The Tatler.* The depth of comprehension and the heartfelt sympathy betray personal experience. "With all the good intentions in the world," Steele declares, "this creature sins on against Heaven, himself, his friends, and his country, who all call for a better use of his talents. There is not a being under the sun so miserable as this: he goes on in a pursuit he himself disapproves, and has no enjoyment but what is followed by remorse; no relief from remorse but the repetition of his crime." This is the character, seen from within, which Swift, after his quarrel with Steele, described with customary bitterness from without: "He has committed more absurdities, in economy, friendship, love, duty, good manners, politicks, religion, and writing, than ever fell to one man's share."

Steele had made various literary ventures before he struck upon the form which has given him an assured position in English literature. *The Christian Hero,* in which he delineated the character he would fain have been, but could not emulate, was followed by several plays; and these were good enough to induce Lamb to contrast the pleasure of expecting Steele or Farquhar with the pain of finding—Adam Smith. Steele's appointment as gazetteer in 1707 gave him employment which may by courtesy be called literary. But this task by no means demanded all his energies, and Defoe's *Review* supplied the hint so happily worked out in *The Tatler,* of which the first number appeared on April 12, 1709. Steele himself is the best expositor of his own design. In the dedication of the first volume to Mr. Maynwaring he says: "The general purpose of this paper is to expose the false arts of life, to pull off the disguises of cunning, vanity, and affectation, and to recommend a general simplicity in our dress, our discourse, and our behaviour." This is supplemented by hints in the first number of *The Tatler,* in which the main

divisions of the work are set forth in connection with various coffee-houses. Hence it appears that the paper is to contain accounts of gallantry, pleasure and entertainment; poetry; learning; foreign and domestic news. There is a fifth and most comprehensive division—"what else I have to offer on any other subject." The original motto, "quicquid agunt homines . . . nostri est farrago libelli," is, in short, a perfect description of the subject-matter of *The Tatler*. The name, Isaac Bickerstaff, was, as is well known, borrowed from Swift. Its familiarity helped to gain an audience for the new paper; and the need of a pseudonym of some sort is explained by Steele in a frank and manly passage of the concluding number. "The general purpose of the whole," he says, "has been to recommend truth, innocence, honour, and virtue, as the chief ornaments of life; but I considered, that severity of manners was absolutely necessary to him who would censure others, and for *that reason, and that only*, chose to talk in a mask. I shall not carry my humility so far as to call myself a vicious man, but at the same time must confess, my life is at best but pardonable. And, with no greater character than this, a man would make but an indifferent progress in attacking prevailing and fashionable vices, which Mr. Bickerstaff has done with a freedom of spirit, that would have lost both its beauty and efficacy, had it been pretended to by Mr. Steele."

The Tatler appeared three times a week, and as at the beginning it was written practically by Steele alone, the strain of maintaining it was very great. Evidence of a certain dearth of matter appears at an early stage. Thus, No. 6 is padded with the first instalment of a "journal of the Iliad," and No. 35 with a long quotation from Hamlet's advice to the players; while No. 7 contains an appeal to any gentleman or lady to send "the grief or joy of their soul" to Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq. The dearth seems to have been due partly to the novelty of

the undertaking, for there is less evidence of it in the later volumes. Nevertheless, Steele must have welcomed the occasional assistance he received, and especially the accession of Addison, who early discovered that Bickerstaff was Steele, and who wrote occasionally from the eighteenth number onwards, though it was not till some eighty or ninety papers had appeared that his contributions became frequent. At no time during the continuance of *The Tatler* did Addison dethrone Steele from the leading position. Not only the design, but the majority of the contributions, were Steele's. It is impossible to ascertain with complete certainty and precision what he wrote, but between April 12, 1709, when *The Tatler* was begun, and January 2, 1711, when it came to an end, he appears to have contributed about one hundred and seventy papers. It was a scale of production modest indeed in comparison with Defoe's, but nevertheless remarkable enough.

Gay, in the pamphlet entitled *The Present State of Wit*, which has been printed among the works of Swift, declared that "never man threw up his pen under stronger temptations to have employed it longer," and added some sentences of eulogy as sound as anything that has ever been written upon the subject:—

"It would have been a jest some time since, for a man to have asserted that anything witty could be said in praise of a married state; or that devotion or virtue were any way necessary to the character of a fine gentleman. Bickerstaff ventured to tell the town, that they were a parcel of fops, fools, and vain coquettes; but in such a manner, as even pleased them, and made them more than half inclined to believe that he spoke the truth.

"Instead of complying with the false sentiments or vicious tastes of the age, either in morality, criticism, or good breeding, he has boldly assured them, that they were altogether in the wrong, and commanded them, with an authority which

perfectly well became him, to surrender themselves to his arguments for virtue and good sense.

"It is incredible to conceive the effect his writings have had on the town; how many thousand follies they have either quite banished, or given a very great check to; how much countenance they have added to virtue and religion; how many people they have rendered happy, by showing them it was their own fault if they were not so; and, lastly, how entirely they have convinced our fops and young fellows of the value and advantages of learning."

The appearance of *The Spectator* revealed the reason why *The Tatler* had been brought to an end. Barely two months intervened between the one paper and the other, the first issue of *The Spectator* appearing on March 1, 1711. The town, which had considered the production of three *Tatlers* weekly something of a feat, was surprised to find that the new paper was to appear daily. This frequency was rendered possible only by the close union and perfect understanding between Steele and Addison. In *The Tatler* Addison had been an occasional, and latterly a frequent, contributor; in *The Spectator* they were coadjutors from the start. The plan was the outcome of deliberations held between them, but Drake, from the great deference always paid by Steele to Addison, conjectures that the scheme of the new paper was laid by the latter. The ground for this conjecture seems unsafe. No doubt Steele would readily have yielded to any suggestions made by his friend; but on the other hand the evidence we possess points to the conclusion that Steele's was the more richly originative mind of the two. Without Addison he framed the plan of *The Tatler*; without Addison he sketched the outline of the character of Sir Roger de Coverley—a fact too frequently forgotten. It seems therefore quite as probable that Steele suggested the idea of the Spectator and his Club, as that Addison did so. Possibly the idea was borrowed from

the machinery of *The Athenian Gazette*, which had run from 1690 to 1696. By whomsoever originated, it is certain that the human figure of the Spectator (which was drawn by Addison), surrounded by his club of representatives of various grades and classes of society, was an immense improvement on *The Tatler's* crude machinery of the coffee-houses and its shadowy figure of Bickerstaff. Herein consists the superiority of *The Spectator*, so far as it is real. Take away Sir Roger, Sir Andrew, Will Honeycomb and the Spectator himself, and all must feel that the charm would be gone. *The Tatler* is a collection of disconnected essays, but these figures make of *The Spectator* a sort of unity, though a very imperfect one. It has often been pointed out that the creators of Sir Roger were almost novelists; and a moment's consideration shows that the gap between the De Coverley papers, when they are once gathered together, and the *Vicar of Wakefield*, is not great. But, though Sir Roger is the principal figure, the others are helpful as well, and together they illustrate and enforce the truth of Pope's line, "the proper study of mankind is man." It was largely the presence of these human figures that caused *The Spectator* to be, by contemporaries as well as in later days, more highly esteemed than its predecessor. Its popularity was still great when, on December 6, 1712, it was temporarily suspended. After its resuscitation in June 1714 it appeared only three times a week; and even on this reduced scale it did not survive beyond the close of the year. The eighth volume of *The Spectator* is made up of papers contributed after this resuscitation; and the title was usurped for a ninth volume with which Steele and Addison had nothing to do.

To *The Spectator* the contributions of Addison were slightly more numerous than those of Steele, and they are thought to be of much higher merit. But probably opinion has been influenced in some degree by Steele's depreciation of himself

in comparison with the friend whom he delighted to honour. Every one knows how, referring to the assistance he got from Addison in *The Tatler*, he spoke of himself as faring like a distressed prince who calls in to his aid a powerful neighbour; and too many have accepted this as an accurate account of the relative positions of the two men. No doubt Addison is on the whole superior. He is a far more finished writer, more correct, more scholarly, more subtly humorous. Steel's style is like his life, as Thackeray said, "full of faults and careless blunders; and redeemed, like that, by his sweet and compassionate nature." It was Thackeray too who pointed out the great service done by Steele in his reverence for the pieties of the home, his respect for women and his love of children. Here he is certainly a better moralist than Addison. The latter, it is true, is incapable of the grossness which disfigures his predecessors the Restoration writers, and his contemporary Swift; but though not gross he is contemptuous. The famous compliment which Steele paid to Lady Elizabeth Hastings under the unhappily-chosen name of Aspasia—"to love her was a liberal education"—could never have been paid by Addison. There is such a thing as tone in writing, as well as style, and Steele at his best is as much superior to Addison in the former quality as he is inferior in the latter.

Apart from their other moral qualities, there is in Steele's papers an open frankness which makes them extremely attractive. Hardly any form of literature is more fascinating than autobiography, when it is sincere; and, without professing to be so, Steele is habitually autobiographical. He is doubtless all the more sincere because frequently his self-revelation is unconscious. He does not often tell facts of his own life, but he constantly reveals the feelings of his heart; indeed his fault is not reticence but rather the opposite. It is startling to find him filling a gap in *The Tatler* with letters which he had written to his own wife: but his literary ex

pedients were as ready, as various and as free from restraint as the shifts of his life. Just as he dressed up the bailiffs in livery to wait on his distinguished friends, so he was ready to press any scrap of writing into service in place of the paper which was unwritten because of the revel of the night before. Just as we cannot approve of the shifts of his life, so we may shrink from some of his literary expedients; but we must bear in mind that life and literary works are all of a piece, that virtues and vices, blemishes and beauties, are so inextricably bound together that Richard Steele's writings would have been impossible had Richard Steele himself been either a better man or a worse one. In the case of no other English writer, probably, does the written word more faithfully depict the writer.

Joseph Addison (1672–1719), whom Steele so readily and gladly welcomed as an associate in his enterprise, has carried away more than his share of the renown of the periodical essay. That he was, both as man and as writer, far less faulty than Steele is clear; but for more than a century after the death of both men few voices were raised to question whether it was equally clear that he had higher merits. There was much in the character as well as in the writings of Addison that appealed to the English sense of respectability. Everybody knew the story of his summoning his stepson to "see how a Christian could die"; comparatively few had read Walpole's malicious comment, that "unluckily he died of brandy." He was universally regarded as an upright, clean-living, humane and pious man. He was more; he was gifted with great personal attractiveness. On the occasion of his re-election as M.P. for Malmesbury in 1710, Swift avowed his belief that if Addison "had a mind to be chosen king, he would hardly be refused"; and Pope declared that he "had something more charming in his conversation than I ever knew in any other man." Power to inspire the deepest affection is testified by

the fine passage in Tickell's lines to the Earl of Warwick beginning,

> "Can I forget the dismal night, that gave
> My soul's best part for ever to the grave!"

And yet there was another side. Pope's character of Atticus would be far less effective than it is were there no bed-rock of truth beneath it. Johnson, in his judgment on the memorable friendship of the two great essayists, awards the palm to Steele; and if his story of the execution ordered by Addison to recover his £100 from Steele be true, it is certain that no such blow would ever have been struck by Steele against a friend.[1] The truth is that Addison, the juster man of the two, was the less generous. While he was safe from Steele's lapses, he could never soar to the heights his friend occasionally reached. In Addison the head is dominant, in Steele the heart; and hence the former is far more typical of his time than the latter. No one lived more eagerly in the present than Steele, no one was more fully absorbed in life *as he found it and satisfied with art as the Augustans were* making it; and yet, more than any contemporary, he reached back towards a higher art in the past, and on towards the romanticists of the future. This is why justice has tardily been done to Steele. This is why the question has come to be asked whether Addison was so unmistakably greater than Steele; and the answer has been unhesitatingly given that, at any rate, he was not greater in the degree in which both he himself and Steele believed him to be so. This is why Landor

[1] The truth of the story has been doubted; but Johnson told Malone that he had it from Savage, who lived in intimacy with Steele, and who mentioned that Steele told him the story with tears in his eyes. Johnson said to Boswell: "Sir, it is generally known, it is known to all who are acquainted with the literary history of that period It is as well known as that he wrote Cato."

praised Steele so highly as a critic, and Thackeray, though with hesitation and doubt, qualified the judgment of Macaulay.

In the case of Addison the question of character is strictly relevant to a judgment on his literary work. Few English authors more accurately and exactly reveal themselves in their writings; and Addison has been so long accepted as the safest model for those who wish to learn how to write English prose, that this might seem to be almost the highest praise it is possible to bestow. But as in the man so in the writer, examination reveals not so much defects as limits, and compels qualification. The *safest* model is that which most surely teaches how to avoid error, not necessarily that which shows the highest beauties. Johnson's famous injunction to the student of style to "give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison," is too often remembered without Johnson's qualification. It is addressed by him to "whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious." So qualified, the advice is sound; but it leaves possible another judgment, which in fact Johnson has pronounced also. A style of which this may be said may yet be destitute of the highest beauties. And Addison's is destitute of the highest beauties. It is a far safer model than Johnson's; but Addison never wrote nor could have written anything equal to the letter to Chesterfield. It is incomparably safer than Carlyle's; but there are passages in Carlyle as immeasurably beyond Addison's highest flight as the eagle's flight is beyond the sparrow's.

The cause is obvious. The greatest style is the expression of the highest energy, intellectual and moral. This is the reason why our greatest poets, Shakespeare and Milton, are likewise, at their best, among our greatest prose-writers; and it is also the reason why Addison, who had not the energy to be more than a third-rate poet, might be a safe model for the learner, but could never rise to the highest rank. The separation of

form from substance leads to error, unless we constantly remind ourselves that this separation is only provisional, an analysis for our temporary convenience of things which are in fact inseparable. It is the forgetting this that has set Addison on a pedestal too lofty for him, and has led to the disappointment of multitudes who have learnt, with astonishment, how unsubstantial is that to which their guides have advised them to give their days and nights. Here it is that Matthew Arnold finds in Addison "the note of provinciality." Addison's prose, says Arnold, "is Attic prose;" and he contrasts it, to [illegible] Burke) whom he [illegible] But then, "it is comparatively a small matter to express oneself well, if one will be content with not expressing much, with expressing only trite ideas; the problem is to express new and profound ideas in a perfectly sound and classical style." It is here that Addison fails. His ideas are trite, at least they are not "the [illegible] that Addison cannot stand high in the roll of fame. And yet, on the other hand, it should be recognised that the service he did to English literature was great. There is a sense in which he may fairly be said to have perfected English prose style. He represents, in this matter, "our indispensable eighteenth century." How great was the need of him may be seen if we look back into the preceding century, and observe a man so incomparably superior to Addison as Milton floundering, except in his moments of inspiration, in the tangle of a prose which hardly knows its own aim; or one so richly gifted as Sir Thomas Browne seriously injuring the literary taste of the nation by the freaks of his diction; or Jeremy Taylor, carried away by the Asiatic taste which is so irreconcilable with the Attic. It was not Addison alone who taught the lesson of neatness, lucidity and precision. Much had been done by Dryden,

much was done by Steele, much too by Defoe and Swift. But no one did more than Addison. He and the Queen Anne essayists have been a permanent force on the side of sanity and restraint of thought and clearness of expression.

The form which Steele had created, or at least developed, was singularly well adapted to Addison. It brought out all that was best in him, and tended to conceal his deficiencies; and so it has helped to keep him in a place somewhat loftier than his merits entitle him to. Addison was a moralist; and *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* aimed at being moral forces. But Addison was, as we have seen, something lower than the greatest; and they lent themselves more readily to the minor morals than to the major. The want of force was not perceptible in a writer satirising good-naturedly the vanity of women or the follies of the town. On the contrary, it may have been an advantage—for the time at least. To have devoted great strength to such ends would have been like breaking a butterfly on the wheel. At a later date we shall see Johnson hampered in such work by that very force which Addison had not. It is this adaptation of the instrument to the performer which makes Addison on the whole the best of his class.

Addison's principal literary gifts were a delicate though not highly original taste, a keen sense of humour, and an insight into character. They are all united in what is certainly his greatest achievement—the character of Sir Roger de Coverley; for though Sir Roger was first sketched and was afterwards occasionally touched by Steele, he is in the main Addison's creation. And he is unquestionably one of the treasures of our literature. In nothing else has Addison shown such originality, in nothing else such exquisite skill. If Sir Roger were eliminated it might be possible to accept that judgment of Hazlitt's which sets *The Tatler* above *The Spectator*; but then, to demand his elimination is not much more reasonable

a doubt whether Steele had ever been surpassed as a critic. It is not always safe to accept Landor's judgments, and this one bears the mark of exaggeration. Still, he did good service in calling attention to the fact that, in respect of some of the functions of criticism, Steele was as highly gifted as any man of his time. In respect of *some* of the functions of criticism; for there is a sense in which it might be maintained that he was not a critic at all. Of reasoned and deliberate critical principles he probably had none; but for critical intuition he was unsurpassed and probably unequalled in his own day. Naturally therefore his criticisms are only occasional, but they show a fine instinct for what is good in literature. Probably no contemporary was so free as he from the conventions of the time. Just because he trusted his instinct and cared little about reasoned critical principles, he was ready to admire what was admirable under whatever guise he found it. The 'rules' which troubled Dryden troubled not Steele at all. Hence few men of his time so warmly loved Shakespeare. It mattered not to him whether the beauties were "native wood-notes wild," or the product of the nicest art. He was a moralist in his criticisms, as he was always, and he found Shakespeare to be a great moral teacher. It was impossible, he thought, to turn from the noble characters drawn by him without strong impressions of honour and humanity. "Distress is laid before us with all its causes and consequences, and our resentment placed according to the merit of the persons afflicted"—a doctrine, it is true, which is anathema to many. In other papers he quotes with high praise and just appreciation the dream of Richard III. and the speech of Hamlet on his mother's hasty marriage. He contrasts with such works the licentious drama of the Restoration, of which so sincere a moralist could be no admirer. His loathing of its faults and the moral basis of his criticism are well shown in his fine remarks on *The Man of Mode*. He takes

for granted at the start "that a fine gentleman should be honest in his actions, and refined in his language," and discovering that Etherege's fine gentleman is neither the one nor the other, he draws the conclusion that "this whole celebrated piece is a perfect contradiction to good manners, good sense, and common honesty." If the moralist-critic needs justification, it will be found by contrasting this judgment with that of so excellent a critic as Hazlitt on the same piece. While Hazlitt has played upon the surface, Steele has penetrated to the heart.

For formal criticism, however, Addison is by far the greater of the two friends. After his accession the quantity of critical matter in *The Tatler*, and still more in *The Spectator*, largely increased, and the majority of the critical papers were Addison's. In *The Spectator*, for example, he wrote not only the elaborate critique on *Paradise Lost*, but the papers on tragedy, wit and imagination, and those on Chevy Chase as well. Of the two essayists, he certainly was the reasoned and deliberate critic, and the value of his criticism has been estimated at a very high rate by so thoughtful a writer as Mr. Worsfold. But to others, probably the majority, much of it seems antiquated. Just because he wished to be able to give a reason for his conclusions—a desire in itself most praiseworthy,—he was far more influenced by the accepted canons than Steele; and the influence of the accepted canons is always prejudicial. We no longer care to ask the questions about *Paradise Lost* which Addison tries to answer. His treatment of imagination is, however, more instructive; and even if his principles were not wholly new, they were principles which had before been implied rather than adequately expounded. They were moreover principles which were in practice much neglected, and consequently much in need of being insisted upon, in Addison's own day.

Before the temporary cessation of *The Spectator* in December

1712, Steele had resolved to start a new paper; and accordingly the first number of *The Guardian* appeared in March of the following year. It was continued daily for rather more than six months. Why the change was deemed necessary is not obvious, for the differences between the two papers are mainly, first, that some part of the verve and sparkle is gone, and secondly, that there are traces of the influence of party spirit which had been foreign to *The Spectator*. Steele and Addison were still the principal writers; but in the beginning of the new venture Steele had no assistance from his friend, while in the latter half the contributions of Addison outnumber those of Steele, who was then more absorbed in party politics. It was for party purposes that he started *The Englishman* in October 1713.

The action of Steele and Addison themselves, in thus starting periodical after periodical, shows that such literature was both popular and lucrative. If further evidence were needed it would be found in the frequency with which the flattery of imitation was paid to the initiators. Addison himself, in a paper in *The Tatler*, notices some of the imitations. There was a *Re-Tatler*, a *Female Tatler*, a *Whisperer;* and after the demise of *The Tatler*, but during the life of *The Spectator*, there was a Scottish *Tatler* published at Edinburgh. The vogue continued long after Addison and Steele were dead, and was so great that Nathan Drake, in his *Essays Illustrative of the Rambler*, etc., was able to enumerate no fewer than 221 papers, more or less on the model of *The Tatler*, published between its appearance and the year 1809. It would be idle to inquire how many Drake may have omitted. None of these papers equalled the two prototypes, and only a few demand some brief notice.

Another evidence of the popularity of Steele's papers may be found in the distinguished names which are included among the occasional contributors. Among them are nearly

all the well-known writers of the time—Swift, Pope, Berkeley, Congreve, Tickell, Parnell, Gay, Philips. The contributions of some of these are negligible in quantity; but to *The Guardian* Pope contributed eight papers and Berkeley fourteen. As regards quantity, the most considerable of the assistants was Eustace Budgell, a relation by marriage of Addison. He has also the distinction of having touched the character of Sir Roger, as he was the author of the paper which describes the knight at the sport of hare-hunting. Budgell, however, owed more to his relationship with Addison than to his intrinsic merits. Were they not an integral part of *The Spectator* his essays would long since have been lost in the rubbish heap of literature. Next to him in respect of quantity, and above him as regards the quality of his contributions, stands Thomas Hughes, a man who combined in greater perfection than any other of the occasional contributors those qualities which Steele and Addison stamped upon the periodical essay. Hughes seems to have been humorous, observant, amiable, and sincerely desirous of the moral advancement of his fellow-men. His favourite subject was the whims and vanities of women, but he took part also in the serious crusade of the essayists against gaming and debauchery. All his subjects he touched in a style which has not a little of the grace and felicity of Addison.

Alexander Pope (1688–1744) took no part in *The Tatler* and very little in *The Spectator*, but, as has been said, he contributed eight papers to *The Guardian*, and seems to have been deterred from writing more frequently by fear of being associated with the politics of Steele. This is much to be regretted, because the nature of Pope's gifts and the excellence of his other prose writings, such as the prefaces to his Homer and Shakespeare, strengthen the impression derived from his papers in *The Guardian* that he possessed in a remarkable, and possibly in an unequalled degree, the qualities of the

periodical essayist. He was certainly a man of higher genius than either Steele or Addison, and not one of the qualities displayed in his verse would have been alien from the prose of the essays. Perhaps the only points in which he would have been inferior to the two chiefs of the tribe are urbanity and humour. Pope shone in wit, but Addison was certainly his superior in humour. Few as are his papers, they are sufficient to show that Pope was one of the best critics of his time. The satire on Bossu is a masterpiece, and the essay on pastorals is a most skilful piece of irony, though Steele and his friends must have been dense if they really believed that the writer preferred Ambrose Philips to Pope. Irony and satire, however, are just the qualities for which we look in Pope; and it is perhaps more important to observe how this small group of essays illustrates characteristics with which he is less commonly credited. No. 61 of *The Guardian* shows him in the part of a pioneer in the inculcation of humanity to animals; No. 4 is a manly protest against unmanly flattery in dedications; and Nos. 91 and 92, dealing with the Short Club, show a power, rare in men afflicted as Pope was, of laughing good-naturedly at his own physical deficiencies. He is himself the president of the club:—

"The first of these, Dick Distich by name, we have elected president, not only as he is the shortest of us all, but because he has entertained so just a sense of the stature, as to go generally in black, that he may appear yet less. Nay, to that perfection is he arrived, that he stoops as he walks. The figure of the man is odd enough; he is a lively little creature, with long arms and legs. A spider is no ill emblem of him. He has been taken at a distance for a small windmill. But indeed what principally moved us in his favour was his talent in poetry, for he hath promised to undertake a long work in short verse to celebrate the heroes of our size. He has entertained so great a respect for Statius, on the score of that line,

> 'Major in exiguo regnabat corpore virtus'
> ('A larger portion of heroic fire
> Did his small limbs and little breast inspire'),

that he once designed to translate the whole Thebaid for the sake of little Tydeus."

Though Berkeley ranks next after Addison and Steele in the number of his contributions to *The Guardian*, the majority of his essays are devoted to the defence of Christianity and are, for the present purpose, less important than many compositions by less eminent pens on less weighty themes. Most of the other occasional contributors may be passed over in silence. But Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) is a person not to be so summarily dismissed. It is true his connexion with the periodical essay (if we set aside *The Examiner*, the purpose of which was political, not literary) is extremely slight; and his contributions cannot be said to be remarkable for excellence any more than for bulk. He wrote a few papers, or parts of papers, for *The Tatler*, and one from *The Spectator* is printed among his works, though the passage from the *Journal to Stella* adduced in justification makes it clear that Swift claimed only to have supplied the ideas. Addison's was the pen that wrote the essay. Perhaps it may most fairly be regarded as a joint production; for the conception is decidedly Swiftian rather than Addisonian. A few papers of no very striking excellence in Sheridan's Dublin periodical, *The Intelligencer*, are also by Swift. In view of the friendship between him and Steele during the earlier part of *The Tatler's* course, this meagreness of production may seem surprising. But in truth Swift was not by nature fitted for the work. "Swift," says Coleridge, "was the soul of Rabelais dwelling in a dry place." His humour was far too grim and sardonic; he was not the man to deal with the minor morals, nor with the major morals either, by such light touches as alone were appropriate to the

periodical essay. Contrast him with Steele in his attitude towards women, and it is at once evident how greatly inferior, or at least how widely different, the periodical essay must have been had Swift been the guiding spirit. The coarse and discreditable Madonella papers in *The Tatler* are his. Or consider the *Letter to a very young Lady on her Marriage*, which is practically an essay, though it appeared in no periodical. No one can be surprised that the letter is said to have been regarded by the recipient as no compliment either to herself or to her sex. It is arrogant and contemptuous in the extreme. "To say the truth, I never yet knew a tolerable woman to be fond of her own sex. . . . A rout of ladies, got together by themselves, is a very school of impertinence and detraction, and it is well if those be the worst."

The most noteworthy of Swift's contributions to *The Tatler* is the essay on style (No. 230). It is a good paper, and yet perhaps the most remarkable feature in it is the extent to which time has proved this great master of language wrong. He gives eight examples of polysyllables introduced by the war which, he says, "will never be able to live many more campaigns." And yet every one of the eight is still part of the literary language, though 'palisadoes' has, like the Shakespearean 'hurricanoes,' lost its foreign termination. His examples of slang have also proved their vitality by surviving, though some of them certainly have no claim to be reckoned literary. It was, however, in his *Predictions for the Year* 1708 and in the *Account of the Death of Mr. Partridge* that Swift displayed most of the spirit of the periodical essayist, and, though they were not contributed to a periodical, it is by these essays that he is most intimately associated with the periodicals; for, as we have seen, Steele borrowed from him the name Bickerstaff, and with it adopted his dispute with Partridge. These essays, the *Meditation upon a Broomstick*, an

excellent travesty of Boyle's *Meditations*, and the admirably humorous *Scheme to make a Hospital for Incurables*, prove that on occasion Swift could write well in the vein of the periodical essayists. But his intellect was too massive for the essay, and we look for the real Swift rather on the larger canvas of *Gulliver* or the *Tale of a Tub*. Even of the essays the most characteristic are not adapted to the periodical as planned by Steele. The *Hints towards an Essay on Conversation* might, it is true, have been condensed or cut in two. But the wonderful and terrible *Modest Proposal* could never have appeared in the company of Steele and Addison. Though it is a literary masterpiece, the horror would be unpardonable were it not redeemed by the *sæva indignatio* that underlies it; and this *sæva indignatio*, his habitual mood of mind, is the very thing that divides Swift from his essay-writing contemporaries. Even the less known but no less masterly *Argument against abolishing Christianity* could hardly have appeared in *The Spectator*. The grave assurance that the writer is not so weak as to stand up in defence of real Christianity, the suggestion that the abolition of Christianity might possibly involve danger to the Church and would prove the readiest course to introduce Popery, and the argument that the Turks "believe a God; which is more than is required of us, even while we preserve the name of Christians," are all thoroughly Swiftian, but too radical for the periodical essay.

If Swift had but a slight connexion with the periodical essay John Arbuthnot (1667–1735) had none at all; yet so clearly in his place beside Swift that he will most conveniently be treated here. Nearly all that he has written is imbued more or less with the essay spirit, and the few pieces by him that can be called essays show that his reputation for wit, humour and learning was well deserved. In Johnson's judgment Arbuthnot was the first man and the most universal

genius in the brilliant group to which he belonged, and Macaulay confessed his inability to distinguish between certain passages by Arbuthnot and Swift's best writing. But the universality of genius noted by Johnson told against Arbuthnot's permanent fame. Had he concentrated himself upon literature alone Johnson's judgment might have been confirmed by posterity; for the writings he has left are of the highest quality. But they are merely a handful, the by-products of a very busy mind. In respect of wit, Arbuthnot's fugitive writings are singularly brilliant. The *Humble Petition of the Colliers*, etc., is a very amusing piece of satirical humour, and so is the *Brief Account of John Ginglicutt's Treatise concerning the Altercation or Scolding of the Ancients*. But Arbuthnot's masterpiece is *The Art of Political Lying*, an essay, like the piece on altercation, in the form of a summary of a treatise dealing with the subject, which is supposed to be in the press. Of this piece Swift, in the *Journal to Stella* remarks, "'Tis very pretty, but not so obvious to be understood." But Swift's opinion of the human mind, as of the human heart, was unflattering, and surely a very moderate intelligence might suffice for the enjoyment of Arbuthnot's ready and abundant wit. In its kind, *The Art of Political Lying* is supreme. Witty everywhere, it is perhaps most witty in the treatment of the proof-lie: "A proof-lie is like a proof-charge for a piece of ordnance, to try a standard credulity. Of such a nature he [the supposed author] takes transubstantiation to be in the Church of Rome, a proof-artice, which if any one swallows, they are sure he will digest everything else: therefore the Whig party do wisely to try the credulity of the people by swingers, that they may be able to judge to what height they may charge them afterwards. Towards the end of this chapter he warns the heads of parties against believing their own lies, which has proved of pernicious consequence of late, both a wise party and a wise nation

having regulated their affairs upon lies of their own invention. The causes of this he supposes to be too great a zeal and intenseness in the practice of this art, and a vehement heat in mutual conversation, whereby they persuade themselves that what they wish, and report to be true, is really so." Or again, take the treatment of the miraculous, one species of which is the prodigious: "As to τὸ τερατῶδες, or the prodigious, he has little to advise, but that their comets, whales, and dragons should be sizable; their storms, tempests, and earthquakes without the reach of a day's journey of a man and horse." Perhaps Macaulay had this essay as well as the *History of John Bull* in his mind. Certainly he would be a bold critic who should undertake to distinguish, unless it were, perhaps, by the use of the preposition without, between this and the best writing of Swift.

Popular as the periodical essay was, there were not wanting some who protested against the prevalent style of literature, even while they yielded to the fashion. Among these was Anthony Ashley Cooper (1671–1713), third Earl of Shaftesbury. His *Characteristics* (1711) consists principally of short philosophical treatises; but appended to these is a remarkable collection of *Miscellaneous Reflections* which attests hardly less forcibly than *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* themselves the popularity of the essay. For it is clear that Shaftesbury was an essayist in his own despite. The *Miscellaneous Reflections* may be described as the treatises boiled down and popularised. But the process was evidently distasteful, and it was not carried through without repeated growls. In one passage Shaftesbury describes the Miscellany, or common Essay, as a device for enabling the muddle-headed to become authors. It is a literary form "in which the most confused head, if fraught with a little invention, and provided with Common-place Book learning, might exert itself to as much advantage, as the most orderly and well-settled judgment."

And again: "The common amble or Canterbury is not, I am persuaded, more tiresome to a good rider than the see-saw of essay-writers is to an able reader. The just composer of a legitimate piece is like an able traveller, who exactly measures his ground, premeditates his stages, and intervals of relaxation and intention, to the very conclusion of his undertaking, that he happily arrives where he first professed when he set out. . . . But the post-way is become highly fashionable among modern authors. . . . When an author sits down to write he knows no other business he has, than to be witty, and take care that his periods be well turn'd, or (as they commonly say) *run smooth*. In this manner, he doubts not to gain the character of *bright*. When he has written as many pages as he likes, or as his run of fancy wou'd permit; he then perhaps considers what name he had best give to his new writing; whether he should call it *Letter*, *Essay*, *Miscellany*, or ought else."

Thus the man of unpopular opinions and of rare tastes made his protest; but the futility of the protest is proved by the fact that even while Shaftesbury is making it he is yielding to the current. These protests are embodied in essays—the best attempt Shaftesbury could make to attain that very popularity which he half envied and half despised. How far his judgment may have been unconsciously influenced by personal considerations it is impossible to say; but at least it is clear that he had not in any great measure the gifts which the popular mode of writing demanded. His style was cumbrous, and he lacked the faculty of so treating little things as to make them great. It was for others, not for him, to write meditations on broomsticks.

CHAPTER VI

THE IMITATORS OF STEELE AND ADDISON

Reference has already been made to the crop of imitations which sprouted up in consequence of the extraordinary popularity of Steele and Addison. The Stamp Act of 1712, which imposed a tax of a half-penny on every half-sheet, temporarily checked them. Addison says that a facetious friend who loved a pun called the mortality among authors "the fall of the leaf"; and Swift's *Journal to Stella* notes that "*The Observator* is fallen; the *Medleys* are jumbled together with the *Flying Post;* the *Examiner* is deadly sick; the *Spectator* keeps up, and doubles its price." Ultimately, men made up their minds that they must pay the price necessary for the production of that which they desired to have; and, though the Stamp Act remained, an unbroken stream of new periodicals flowed on through the eighteenth century. In the interval between *The Spectator* and *The Rambler,* however, there was none which rivalled the two great originals and there were few whose fame has survived to the present day. Further, the character of the periodicals changed. They became less literary, and attached themselves to party. In Steele's career *The Englishman* succeeds *The Guardian.* Swift busies himself with *The Examiner* and Addison with *The Whig Examiner.* In an early number of *The Champion* Fielding, under the disguise of a correspondent, expresses his surprise that *The Champion,* though a month old, has never yet dreamt. He himself has dreamt in *The Spectator* in his youth, but in later days has found no vehicle for such

visionary scenes. He is pleased that *The Champion*, not being wholly devoted to politics, allows room for miscellaneous pieces. Then follows an entertaining vision of Helicon and the Muses. The only contemporary papers which *The Champion* finds worthy of praise are *The Craftsman* and *Common Sense*, both political, and both, of course, on the same side of politics as *The Champion*; for there is no blindness so dark as that of party.

It is evident that passages of this sort must not be pressed. The political papers themselves admitted a certain amount of purely literary matter, as we have seen in the case of Defoe. Some of the familiar names of the *Spectator* period continue to appear on the lists of the periodicals. Budgell practised in *The Bee* (1733–1735) the style of composition which Addison had taught him, and Ambrose Philips, who had barely taken part in the greater periodicals, became the chief writer in *The Freethinker* (1718–1719), in which he had the assistance of several of the most distinguished clergymen of the time. In *The Plain Dealer* (1724–1725) Aaron Hill collaborated with William Bond. *The Female Spectator* (1744–1746) and *The Parrot* (1746) are interesting because they were principally, if not wholly, the work of a woman at a time when female writers were few. But the fame of Eliza Haywood, once considerable, is not likely to revive. Some of the periodicals of those years are nearly inaccessible, all of them have sunk into oblivion, and no good purpose would be served by resuscitating them. Between the group already dealt with and Johnson, the only man who needs to be discussed is Fielding.

Henry Fielding (1707–1754) the novelist has so completely overshadowed Henry Fielding the essayist that there are comparatively few who realise his greatness in the latter capacity; and yet to any one who thinks of the introductory chapters to the books of *Tom Jones*, and bears in mind that

they are really essays, it must be obvious that the author was a critic, both of life and of literature, of singular power and insight. The hope which this knowledge inspires is not disappointed when we turn to those half-forgotten periodicals, *The Champion* (1739-1741) and *The Covent-Garden Journal* (1752). The average level is not indeed equal to that of the *Tom Jones* essays. Many of the papers are careless, and it is evident that Fielding did not always exert his whole strength, as he seems to have done in those essays in *Tom Jones*; but when he took trouble he wrote admirably. Though there is some doubt as to the extent of Fielding's share in *The Champion*, the internal evidence points to the conclusion that he was a frequent contributor. If they are not Fielding's, some of the papers are the work of an unknown genius who had Fielding's large humanity and who sympathised, at least, with his genial freedom of life. Captain Vinegar cools himself "as is his custom [and as was too much Fielding's], with a huge dram of brandy." He condemns "roasting," in the metaphorical sense, and pleads to a coarse and cruel age for humanity to animals. "A boy should, in my opinion, be more severely punished for exercising cruelty on a dog or a cat, or any other animal, than for stealing a few pence or shillings, or any of those lesser crimes which our courts of justice take notice of." The magistrate and lawyer speaks here, as well as in an earlier reference to "the impious severity of our laws." Some of the essays are weighty with the moral wisdom which Fielding possessed, though he could not always guide his own steps by it. Some seek to reform abuses by making them ridiculous. In one paper we have a very witty piece of raillery on the *argumentum ad baculum;* another, in a style worthy of *The Spectator*, compares the art of politics to the art of fishing. Two continuous papers give an admirable vision of covetousness and the Palace of Wealth. There is a moral for the present

age as well as for the time of Fielding in the account of a fall from the Palace into the cave of poverty:—

"There were very high and strong rails which prevented any possibility of the spectators falling from the gallery to the bottom of the cave, and yet I observed a great tremor and paleness to seize every one who durst venture to cast their eyes downwards; notwithstanding which, it was very remarkable, that not one of the company could prevail on himself to abstain from surveying the abyss. I had not been here long, when I perceived an old gentleman, whose face I thought I had somewhere seen before, to raise himself with great agility to the top of the rail, whence endeavouring to lay hold on something a little out of his reach, it gave way, and he tumbled down backwards into the cave. Not long after, I saw a very grave man, standing on the top of the rail, attempting to lift others up, whose packs he had before received, tumbling down into the cave, and pulling all those whom he had laid his hands on down with him. Upon this I heard several mutter to themselves, 'Ay, ay, I warrant he will not hurt himself, we shall see him soon again;' and indeed, I soon perceived they were in the right, for I shortly after found him in the gallery, looking much fresher and plumper than before, though the same did not, as I saw, happen to any of those whom he pulled down with him. This made me instantly conceive, that there was some very easy way of ascent from the bottom of this deep cave to the gallery whereon I stood. But I was soon delivered from this error, and informed, that from the bottom of the cave it was almost impossible for any one to ascend again, but that there was a resting-place in the descent, from whence issued a pair of private stairs up to the gallery; that the gentleman I had observed to fall, had a very particular knack of lighting on this place, this being the third time he had performed in this manner; and that he was so far from being hurt, that he grew visibly more lusty after

each fall. This feat of agility, they informed me, was called breaking."

The qualities which mark *The Champion* are shown once more in *The Covent-Garden Journal*. The paper on contempt is a good illustration of Fielding's force and soundness as a moralist; the dream about ants is a telling satire, Swiftian in conception, on the vanity of human theories of the universe; the essay on the usurpation of the word 'betters' by the rich throws a pleasing light on a generous mind. But there are few if any fresh notes, and the failing health of the author betrays itself in the inferior vigour of some of the papers in the later journal. Both, however, deserve to be better known than they are; both are clearly the work of a great man.

Prior to the publication of *The Covent-Garden Journal* Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) had appeared upon the scene as essayist, and his *Rambler* (1750–1752) is usually ranked as the first of the classical periodicals after *The Guardian*. A few years later came *The Idler* (1758–1760); and in the interval Johnson had contributed a considerable number of papers to Hawkesworth's *Adventurer* (1752–1754).

From the very beginning *The Rambler* gave evidence of a heavier hand as well as of a more serious spirit than the earlier periodicals. The popular conception of Johnson's style corresponds perhaps better with *The Rambler* than with any other of his works. The first paper supplies an excellent example:—

"It is one among many reasons for which I purpose to endeavour the entertainment of my countrymen by a short essay on Tuesday and Saturday, that I hope not much to tire those whom I shall not happen to please, and if I am not commended for the beauty of my works, to be at least pardoned for their brevity. But whether my expectations are most fixed on pardon or praise, I think it not necessary to discover; for having accurately weighed the reasons for arrogance and submission, I find them so nearly equiponderant, that my

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The qualities which mark *The Champion* are shown once more in *The Covent-Garden Journal*. The paper on contempt is a good illustration of Fielding's force and soundness as a moralist; the dream about ants is a telling satire, Swiftian in conception, on the vanity of human theories of the universe; the essay on the usurpation of the word 'betters' by the rich throws a pleasing light on a generous mind. But there are few if any fresh notes, and the failing health of the author betrays itself in the inferior vigour of some of the papers in the later journal. Both, however, deserve to be better known than they are; both are clearly the work of a great man.

Prior to the publication of *The Covent-Garden Journal* [illegible] the scene as [illegible] anked as the [illegible] *[illegible]lian*. A few years later came *The Idler* (1758–1760); and in the interval Johnson had contributed a considerable number of papers to Hawkesworth's *Adventurer* (1752–1754).

From the very beginning *The Rambler* gave evidence of a heavier hand as well as of a more serious spirit than the earlier periodicals. The popular conception of Johnson's style corresponds perhaps better with *The Rambler* than with any other of his works. The first paper supplies an excellent example:—

"It is one among many reasons for which I purpose to endeavour the entertainment of my countrymen by a short essay on Tuesday and Saturday, that I hope not much to tire those whom I shall not happen to please; and if I am not commended for the beauty of my works, to be at least pardoned for their brevity. But whether my expectations are most fixed on pardon or praise, I think it not necessary to discover; for having accurately weighed the reasons for arrogance and submission, I find them so nearly equiponderant, that my

impatience to try the event of my first performance will no[t] suffer me to attend any longer the trepidations of the balance."

No one ever wrote like this before Johnson, and those who have done so since have consciously or unconsciously imitated him. Fortunately Johnson himself could write in another style too, and the vigorous English of the *Lives of the Poets* is neither so Latinised nor so antithetical as *The Rambler*. Antithesis and a Latin diction were features of Johnson's style throughout; but, if we regard his works as a whole, far more than enough has been made of them. In *The Rambler*, however, whether through the influence of the dictionary on which he was labouring at the time or not, they are very strongly marked features, and the popular notion of the meaning of "Johnsonese" is so far right. The adoption of such a style carried with it other consequences, because such stateliness of language was peculiarly unsuited to the light subjects which had hitherto been the favourite themes of the essayists. Accordingly we find that the themes of *The Rambler* are almost as widely different from those of *The Spectator* as the style. Steele and Addison loved to suggest reform by raillery of paint and patches and hoop-petticoats, canes and wigs; Johnson trained heavy artillery direct upon the strongholds of vice. The spirit in which he did his work is indicated in the prayer in which he asks the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the composition of *The Rambler*, and "that I may promote thy glory, and the salvation of myself and others." Notwithstanding the genuineness of Addison's moral purpose, he would probably have felt a certain incongruity between the lightness of his method and language so solemn as this.

It is not surprising that *The Rambler* was never popular as periodical. The sale was large when it was reprinted in olumes, but few of the original numbers reached a circulation more than 500. In the closing number Johnson confesses at he has "never been much a favourite of the public." It

is curious that the most popular paper of all, No. 97, was one of the very few that he did not write. Two reasons may be assigned for the superior popularity of the collected editions. Partly, we may suppose, it was due to the fact that these editions were in point of fact better; for, while Johnson wrote the original *Ramblers* rapidly and with little or no revision, he spent great care and pains upon the subsequent editions. According to Chalmers, the alterations made in the second and third editions "far exceed six thousand;" and while many of the changes were trifling, the total effect was considerable. The second reason, however, is more important. *The Rambler* has, as a whole, more the character of a book for serious meditation than for agreeable pastime. *The Spectator* was a natural adjunct to the breakfast-table, and many learnt to look upon it as a necessary one. *The Rambler* was more like what our fathers called Sunday reading; and reading for Sunday was probably shunned on Tuesday and Saturday in the eighteenth century, as it certainly was in the nineteenth. Serious-minded men therefore bought the volumes when they were reissued, and studied them in the hours they devoted to meditation. Those who wished to have the reputation of seriousness bought them also, and slept over them.

It would be a mistake to leave the impression that the original issue of *The Rambler* was a failure. It won for Johnson fit audience, though few. Young, the author of *Night Thoughts*, read it with a minute attention which pleased Johnson. There was too much solid sense and sound learning in the papers to escape the notice or fail to win the admiration of men of powerful intellect. The weight and dignity of the paper on the superiority of patience to Stoicism, and the high-mindedness of the essay on dedications, showed that the writer was a man of no ordinary gifts. There were lighter touches too. The pungent essay on Prospero (Garrick) showed that the writer could, when he chose, wield the weapon

of satire. The paper on Suspirius the Screech-owl, from which Goldsmith drew his Croaker, is also of the old familiar type. Pieces of humour occasionally lightened the severity of moral disquisition and the constitutional melancholy which shone through the majority of the papers. But on the whole the impression is sombre, and it is evident that the periodical essay had been turned to purposes widely different from those of its founders. They are purposes for which it is less admirably fitted. Were he to be judged merely as an essayist, Johnson's place in literature would be far below that of Addison and Steele, and it is not clear that it would be as high as that of Fielding. Even apart from the *Tom Jones* essays there are papers in *The Champion* and *The Covent-Garden Journal* which show more of the true essay spirit than anything in *The Rambler*.

Johnson himself seems to have felt that he had not quite caught the tone. He did not underrate the high merits of *The Rambler;* but in the papers which he contributed to *The Adventurer* and to *The Idler*, of which he wrote by far the greater part, both the touch and the prevailing themes are lighter; and Boswell notes as a consequence that the immediate sale of the former was greater than that of *The Rambler*. In *The Adventurer* we have such papers as that on the companions of Misargyrus in the Fleet and the stage-coach journey; in *The Idler* we have on the one hand the pathetic paper suggested by the death of Johnson's wife (No. 41), and on the other, characters such as Betty Broom and Dick Minim, and the witty ridicule of the bargain hunter, Mrs. Plenty.

The success of *The Adventurer*, which is one of the best of the whole series of periodical papers, was neither wholly nor even principally due to Johnson, but to John Hawkesworth (1715-1773), a man of multifarious literary activity, who is remembered now only as an essayist, and as part author, part

editor of the much-abused account of the voyages of Captain Cook. Considering the age he lived in and the position he won, Hawkesworth's personal history is singularly obscure; but at least by the time when *The Adventurer* was started he was sufficiently prominent to be an acceptable coadjutor to Johnson. The plan of the paper seems to have been their joint work, and though at first Johnson wrote but seldom (he contributed only five of the first fifty papers), he helped to procure the assistance of others. It was through him that Joseph Warton was enlisted for the province of criticism and literature. There were to be three main divisions of the paper, the other two consisting of "pieces of imagination and disquisitions of literature." Warton for the most part confined himself to his province of criticism, and the twentieth century does not readily read the literary criticism of the eighteenth. Yet some of Warton's papers are worthy of attention. Those on the *Odyssey* would be so were it only for their historic interest. Though Thomson was recently dead and Gray and Collins were preparing material for a revolution in poetry, classicism still reigned supreme, and Johnson was its champion. Warton himself had not yet written that essay on the genius of Pope which caused Tyrwhitt to say that it was now possible to maintain that poetry was not confined to rhyming couplets. It is therefore peculiarly interesting to find him in these papers playing the part of champion of the *Odyssey* as against the *Iliad*, the superiority of which was then almost universally taken for granted. It is above all interesting to notice that what attracts Warton to the *Odyssey* is just its romanticism; for though he does not use the *name* he clearly feels the presence of the *thing*: "Greatness, novelty, and beauty are usually and justly reckoned the three principal sources of the pleasures that strike the imagination. If the *Iliad* be allowed to abound in objects that may be referred to the first species, yet the *Odyssey* may boast a greater number of images that are

beautiful and uncommon. The vast variety of scenes p
petually shifting before us, the train of unexpected even
and the many sudden turns in this diversified poem, mu
more deeply engage the reader and keep his attention mor
alive and active than the martial uniformity of the *Iliad*
The continual glare of a single colour that unchangeably pre-
dominates throughout a whole piece, is apt to dazzle and
disgust the eye of the beholder. I will not, indeed, presume
to say with Voltaire, that among the greatest admirers of
antiquity there is scarce one to be found who could ever read
the *Iliad*, with that eagerness and rapture, which a woman
feels when she peruses the novel of *Zayde*; but will, however,
venture to affirm, that the *speciosa miracula* of the *Odyssey*
are better calculated to excite our curiosity and wonder, and
to allure us forward with unextinguished impatience to the
catastrophe, than the perpetual tumult and terror that reign
through the *Iliad*."

Johnson himself in *The Rambler* had carried on the critical
tradition of the periodical essay. In one paper he discusses
the comparative merits of ancient and modern romances, in
another he examines the pauses in English poetry. He
examines the versification of Milton, and reaches the surpris-
ing conclusion that the great poet "has left our harsh cadences
yet harsher"; and he analyses *Samson Agonistes* in order to
discover whether it "is composed according to the indis-
pensable laws of Aristotelian criticism." Evidently he pro-
ceeded upon principles widely different from ours. But more
than enough has been made of the limitations of Johnson's
taste, and of his errors, sometimes gross and provoking enough,
with regard to Milton and other poets with whom he was out
of sympathy. It is more profitable to remember that there
is much to set in the other scale, and that Johnson's criticism
is by no means all negligible even now. Take for example
the following passage from the preface to Shakespeare:—

"His adherence to general nature has exposed him to the censure of criticks, who form their judgment upon narrower principles. Dennis and Rymer think his Romans not sufficiently Roman; and Voltaire censures his kings as not completely royal. Dennis is offended, that Menenius, a senator of Rome, should play the buffoon; and Voltaire perhaps thinks decency violated when the Danish usurper is represented as a drunkard. But Shakespeare always makes nature predominate over accident; and if he preserves the essential character, is not very careful of distinctions superinduced and adventitious. His story requires Romans or kings, but he thinks only on men. He knew that Rome, like every other city, had men of all dispositions; and wanting a buffoon, he went into the senate-house for that which the senate-house would certainly have afforded him. He was inclined to show an usurper and a murderer not only odious, but despicable; he therefore added drunkenness to his other qualities, knowing that kings love wine like other men, and that wine exerts its natural power upon kings. These are the petty cavils of petty minds; a poet overlooks the casual distinctions of country and condition, as a painter, satisfied with the figure, neglects the drapery."

Nervous sense such as this never becomes antiquated. It is as needful now as it was when Johnson wrote. He answers critics who complained that Shakespeare had not done certain things, by showing that he need not do them. There are other critics of the present day who have forgotten the answer, and who therefore, in their anxiety to maintain the infallibility of Shakespeare, contend that he has done that which Johnson knew he neither did nor required to do. Obsession is destructive of criticism—even obsession by Shakespeare.

As has been said already, it is to Hawkesworth himself that the success of *The Adventurer* is principally to be ascribed. The obscurity into which he has fallen is not due t f

merit in the essays, but rather to the fact that he has no capital work with which to support them; for his poems and dramas are deservedly forgotten, and in connexion with the voyages we think rather of Cook than of Hawkesworth. Now very few authors have succeeded in winning permanent fame by reason of fugitive essays. In *The Adventurer*, moreover, Hawkesworth is crushed under the weight of Johnson, though he shows himself, for the purpose in view, the better writer of the two. (Hawkesworth deliberately imitated Johnson, and this fact may have disposed the latter the more readily to collaborate with him. But, while he is Johnsonian in style, his touch is lighter and his themes more varied than Johnson's.) He maintains the moral purpose of the earlier essayists, is the champion of religion, inculcates milder manners, and in the excellent paper (No. 5) on various forms of cruelty, advocates, like Fielding, kindness to the animal creation. The special feature of *The Adventurer*, however, is the frequency with which it resorts to the short story; and it was here, especially in the Eastern tale, that Hawkesworth particularly excelled. There were, of course, stories, Eastern and Western, in the earlier periodicals; Johnson himself introduces several Eastern ones into *The Rambler;* but in none of the earlier papers were they so numerous as in *The Adventurer*, and none of the periodical essayists has excelled Hawkesworth in skill in the construction of them. All his Eastern tales are worthy of praise; but perhaps the best is that of the avaricious Carazan. While Hawkesworth has nothing that can be set beside the exquisite De Coverley papers, Carazan is quite worthy to be placed beside the *Vision of Mirza*. The condemnation pronounced by the Deity is impressive:—

"'Carazan, thy worship has not been accepted, because it was not prompted by love of God; neither can thy righteousness be rewarded, because it was not produced by love of

Man; for thy own sake only hast thou rendered to every man his due; and thou hast approached the Almighty only for thyself. Thou hast not looked up with gratitude, nor around thee with kindness. Around thee, thou hast indeed beheld vice and folly; but if vice and folly could justify thy parsimony, would they not condemn the bounty of Heaven? If not upon the foolish and the vicious, where shall the sun diffuse his light, or the clouds distil their dew? Where shall the lips of the spring breathe fragrance, or the hand of autumn diffuse plenty? Remember, Carazan, that thou hast shut compassion from thine heart, and grasped thy treasures with a hand of iron: thou hast lived for thyself; and, therefore, henceforth for ever thou shalt subsist alone. From the light of heaven, and from the society of all beings, shalt thou be driven; solitude shall protract the lingering hours of eternity, and darkness aggravate the horrors of despair.' At this moment I was driven by some secret and irresistible power through the glowing system of creation, and passed innumerable worlds in a moment. As I approached the verge of nature, I perceived the shadows of total and boundless vacuity deepen before me, a dreadful region of eternal silence, solitude, and darkness! Unutterable horror seized me at the prospect, and this exclamation burst from me with all the vehemence of desire: 'O! that I had been doomed for ever to the common receptacle of impenitence and guilt! their society would have alleviated the torment of despair, and the rage of fire could not have excluded the comfort of light. Or if I had been condemned to reside in a comet that would return but once in a thousand years to the regions of light and life; the hope of these periods, however distant, would cheer me in the dread interval of cold and darkness, and the vicissitude would divide eternity into time.' While this thought passed over my mind, I lost sight of the remotest star, and the last glimmering of light was quenched in utter darkness. The agonies of

despair every moment increased, as every moment augmented my distance from the last habitable world. I reflected with intolerable anguish, that when ten thousand thousand years had carried me beyond the reach of all but that Power who fills infinitude, I should still look forward into an immense abyss of darkness, through which I should still drive without succour and without society, farther and farther still, for ever and for ever."

This is thoroughly Johnsonian; but the subject suits the stately periods, and they are turned with a skill which the originator himself rarely surpassed.

During and after the period of the three Johnsonian papers the stream of periodical essays flowed on, but the possibilities of the form, except in the hands of men of rare genius, were exhausted, and only two or three of these publications demand notice. Among the exceptions was *The World* (1753–1756), which was conspicuous both for its ability and for the eminence in other spheres of one or two of the contributors. With respect to its tone and contents, *The World* may be regarded as a reaction from *The Rambler*. As the latter had scarcely anything corresponding to the lighter papers of *The Spectator*, so the former had very little answering to the more serious ones. And as regards immediate popularity the projector and his assistants were justified by the results. According to Drake, the circulation of *The World* in numbers was "unprecedentedly great"; but he adds that this was "owing, in a high degree, to the various titled and fashionable names that were known to assist in its composition," and that "it is now, if we except *The Connoisseur*, less read than any of what may be termed the Classical Essayists."

The contributors to *The World* numbered over thirty, but between one-third and one-fourth of the total number of papers were written by its projector, Edward Moore. Moore, however, is not especially notable except for his

position and the number of his contributions. His papers are essentially imitative. R. O. Cambridge was also a tolerably frequent contributor, and Horace Walpole wrote nine papers of no great merit. By far the most notable in this group was Lord Chesterfield (1694–1773). He had already written essays in *Fog's Journal* and in *Common Sense;* and these, as well as his contributions to *The World*, show that if he had devoted himself to literature he might have won a high reputation. The two papers written to recommend Johnson's dictionary are best known because of the incomparable letter which they drew from the lexicographer. The essays on the Drinking Club are good examples of the lighter treatment of vice; and there are others which go some way towards proving that Chesterfield's moral character was by no means in all respects so low as it has commonly been supposed to be. The essay on duelling is excellent. But above all, the character of the fashionable man of honour is delineated with a biting irony which shows that Chesterfield was capable of deep feeling and able to rise above the prejudices of his class. There are but two things, he says, which a man of the nicest honour may not do, "which are declining single combat and cheating at cards." Leader of *ton* as he was, Chesterfield could not consent to regard these as the whole duty of man. "Strange! that virtue should be so difficult, and honour, its superior, so easy to attain to." It is evident that Chesterfield was conscious of the high merit of this essay; for the paper in *The World* is in substance a reproduction of one which had appeared many years before in *Common Sense*. The latter is in some respects the better of the two. After a series of imaginary letters from the typical man of honour, Belville, it contains an admirable summing up of the character, conceived in a spirit which would have done honour to the best and purest of the periodical essayists:—

"It appears from these authentic pieces, that Mr. Belville,

filled with the noblest sentiments of honour, paid all debts but his just ones; kept his word scrupulously in the flagitious sale of his conscience to a minister; was ready to protect, at the expense of his friend's life, his friend's wife, whom, by the opportunities that friendship had given him, he had corrupted; and punished truth with death, when it intimated, however justly, the want of it in himself.

"This person of refined honour, conscious of his own merit and virtue, is a most unmerciful censor of the lesser vices and failings of others; and lavishly bestows the epithets of scoundrel and rascal upon all those who, in a subordinate rank of life, seem to aspire to any genteel degree of immorality. An awkward country gentleman, who sells his silent vote cheap, is with him a sad dog. The industrious tradesmen are a pack of cheating rascals, who should be better regulated, and not suffered to impose upon people of condition; and servants are a parcel of idle scoundrels, that ought to be used ill and not paid their wages, in order to check their insolence.

"It is not to be imagined how pernicious the example of such a creature is to society; he is admired, and consequently imitated: he not only immediately corrupts his own circle of acquaintance, but the contagion spreads itself to infinity, as circles in water produce one another, though gradually less marked out, in proportion as they are remoter from the cause of the first.

"To such practice and such examples in higher life, may justly be imputed the general corruption and immorality, vhich prevail through the kingdom. But, when such is the orce of fashion, and when the examples of people of the first ank in a country are so prevalent as to dignify vice and im-orality, in spite of all laws divine and human, how popular ght they make virtue, if they would exert their power in its use? and how must they, in their cooler moments, reproach mselves, when they come to reflect, that, by their fatal

examples, they have beggared, corrupted, and, it may be, enslaved, a whole nation!"

If this passage be *sincere*, it shows the need for revising the popular estimate of Chesterfield's character; if insincere, it is a masterpiece in the art of counterfeiting. The writer seems to be imbued with the love of truth; yet Cowper called him her "polish'd and high-finished foe." It is commonly supposed that his morality was nothing but the convention of his class, and that he was prepared to condone the deepest immorality, provided only it did not violate that convention; yet here we have an example of a power hardly to be surpassed of rising above convention, and viewing right and wrong in themselves. Churton Collins has given reasons for the view that judgment upon Chesterfield's letters to his son has been at best one-sided. It is necessary also to remember that there are letters to his godson as well as letters to his son, and that there are these essays and other documents as well, upon which to found an opinion. "The Rochefoucauld of England," as Sainte-Beuve called him, has had hard measure. We should at least remember that he was an admirable writer.

The Connoisseur (1754–1756) started a little later and closed a little earlier than *The World*. It resembled the latter in general character, but was inferior in quality. The principal authors were George Colman and Bonnell Thornton, who usually wrote their essays jointly. Though they were able young men, the most memorable circumstance connected with their paper is the fact that at least three and probably five essays were contributed by the poet Cowper. These essays have the grace which Cowper never failed to impart to his subject, and one of them, on the state of country churches, clergy and congregations, is of great value as an authentic account of a condition of matters which would hardly be credible were it not so well attested.

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The political *Monitor* (1755–1759) may be named in passing for the sake of Beckford who projected it; but in the literary sense the next noteworthy publications are *The Bee* and *The Public Ledger*, in which appeared *The Citizen of the World*. These bring us into contact with a name greater, in the history of the essay, than any from Addison's day to his own.

The name of Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774) used to suggest, and probably still suggests, to the minds of many ideas of the most extraordinary sort. One of his contemporaries called him an inspired idiot; another put the same judgment into rhyme, and declared that he "wrote like an angel, and talked like poor Poll," while one of the foremost writers of the century after Goldsmith's pronounced this judgment just. And yet we all know that Johnson himself, when he came to write the epitaph of his friend, declared that he had attempted nearly every species of composition, and adorned every one that he attempted; and we all know, further, that Johnson said no more than the truth. Now it is certain that genius is not incompatible with that sort of disorder of mind which leads to the madhouse; but it is far more difficult to conceive of genius united with imbecility than to imagine it united with irregularity. Let it be granted, however, that some mysterious force called inspiration may produce, for once, even this astounding union, and we are still only at the beginning of the difficulty in the case of Goldsmith. We have to suppose the union so constant, while he has pen in hand, as to make Goldsmith one of the most charming poets, one of the best dramatists, and one of the greatest essayists of the eighteenth century. We have to suppose it so constant as to give even his hack-work a literary value. However worthless it may be as science, Goldsmith's history of *Animated Nature* is very pleasant reading, and, if it were possible to ignore the question of accuracy, would be better adapted for conveying

to young minds ideas on the subject treated than any other book we possess.

It is remarkable that Boswell, who is largely responsible for this astonishing view of Goldsmith, has had almost the same fate, and that the critic who thought the phrase, an inspired idiot, appropriate to the Irishman, declared of the Scot that if he "had not been a great fool, he would never have been a great writer." Carlyle has made this opinion about Boswell impossible, and the simple process of reading Goldsmith's works ought to be fatal to the other opinion. A very little reflection suffices to show that Goldsmith's exquisite style is inseparable from soundness of intelligence. The steady and certain evolution of thought in *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village* indicates not inferior but most exceptional intellectual power, and the humour of *The Vicar of Wakefield* and of the plays is surely an evidence of a mind remarkably sane and well balanced. If further evidence were needed, probably the most convincing of all would be found in the essays. These have been unduly neglected. In Drake's table of periodical papers such mediocre productions as *The Connoisseur* and *The Observer* are distinguished with capitals as standard works; while *The Bee* and *The Citizen of the World* appear in ordinary type; and to this day, when we think of Goldsmith, we usually call to mind *The Vicar of Wakefield*, or *She Stoops to Conquer*, or *The Deserted Village*. Probably not one in ten thinks for a moment of *The Citizen of the World* as one of the finest collections of essays ever written, and a work quite worthy of a place beside its author's more popular writings. Goldsmith's literary greatness may be measured by the fact that he has equalled Addison on Addison's own ground, and greatly surpassed him elsewhere.

Goldsmith contributed to *The Monthly Review* in 1757, and to several other periodicals as well; but his articles have

not been identified. The earliest periodical with which his name is permanently associated was *The Bee* (1759). It was published weekly, and contained, not a single essay, but a variety of papers, each number filling about twenty pages in Bohn's edition. If Goldsmith wrote the whole of the papers, as he is supposed to have done, his productiveness was surprising; and it was not gained at the expense of quality. Yet, excellent as was the matter he supplied, *The Bee* survived for only eight numbers. They were, however, sufficient to prove the greatness of the writer. There is keen observation in the paper on dress and in the admirable *City Night Piece*. A delicate though hardly catholic gift of criticism is shown in the remarks on the theatres, and in the exquisite reverie, *The Fame Machine*. The latter shows that Goldsmith was already one of those who understood the greatness of Johnson, and it probably helped to bring about the friendship between the two men which began soon afterwards. A few months subsequent to the close of *The Bee*, *The Citizen of the World* (1760–1761) began to appear in a journal called *The Public Ledger*. Whether Goldsmith from the first projected a lengthy series of letters is not clear; it seems probable rather that he proposed to act according to circumstances, and the design was of a very elastic sort. Undoubtedly one of the advantages of the new venture, as compared with *The Bee*, was that it did start with a clear and intelligible design. This design was not original. Goldsmith himself had translated for *The Bee* the passage in which Voltaire comments upon the surprise with which an Asiatic visitor might contemplate the religion of Europe; and there were other sources from which he got hints, or might have got them. Horace Walpole had, a few years before, written the *Letter from Xo-Ho, a Chinese Philosopher at London, to his Friend Lien Chi at Peking*. Swift had long ago conceived the idea of an Indian visiting England, and Steele had used it. There were besides

Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes.* Whatever was the source from which Goldsmith took the idea, he wore the disguise loosely enough. He has been severely blamed for not studying the Chinese point of view more carefully, and more consistently maintaining it; and if the matter were of any importance he would deserve censure. But it is never good criticism to blame an author for not doing what he does not propose to do; and assuredly Goldsmith never seriously proposed to criticise England from the point of view of the Chinaman. A conception imparting unity was important, just as it is important to have a string for a necklace of pearls; consistency to the Chinese point of view was as completely subordinate as the question of the texture of the string.

Goldsmith's letters were instantly popular, and their effect seems to have been to increase greatly the circulation of the journal in which they appeared. They also raised Goldsmith's own reputation, and encouraged him to further composition of the same sort. In 1765 there appeared a collection of his essays, which was enlarged in the following year. Some, but not all, of these had previously appeared in *The Bee* and *The Citizen of the World.* By these periodicals then, and by this collection, we must judge Goldsmith as essayist. Perhaps the most important thing to notice about them, in view of the "inspired idiot" theory, is the extraordinary power, boldness and originality of thought shown in them. In this respect Goldsmith is greatly superior to Addison or any other of the periodical essayists. Of Goldsmith it must be said, as it has been said already of Hawkesworth, that he has nothing of their kind equal to the De Coverley papers. It is true he gives us the Man in Black and Beau Tibbs, and in the delineation of vagabonds he is unequalled. The cheery philosophy of the maimed soldier seems to be an anticipation of Mark Tapley, and the Strolling Player (who may be compared with the rascal in *The Vicar of Wakefield*) is excellent.

Perhaps a touch of fellow-feeling and personal experience, and certainly a kindly sympathy, inspired Goldsmith in these papers. But still, for an equal to Sir Roger we must go outside the essays to *The Vicar of Wakefield*. So far, then, if we confine the view to the essays, the palm must be assigned to Addison. In point of style both are admitted to be masters, but Goldsmith is the greater of the two. He is greater just because style, in the last resort, is inseparable from thought; just because of that provinciality, that commonplaceness of idea, which Matthew Arnold detected in Addison, and which is not in Goldsmith.

The point is so important that it deserves a somewhat careful examination. Wherever we test him, it will be found that Goldsmith is perhaps the most original man of his time. We do not commonly associate his name with political ideas; and yet he gives expression to political conceptions more profound than any contemporary, except Burke, had grasped. In the first place, *The Citizen of the World* makes it evident that Goldsmith was a criminal-law reformer before the days of criminal-law reform; and the well-known prison-scenes in *The Vicar of Wakefield* show that his protest was not a mere passing thought, but the outcoming of a deliberate and fixed conviction. Again, Goldsmith saw the menace of the strength of Russia long before those who called themselves statesmen were awake to it. He detected the danger of the position of England in the American colonies, and analysed in a masterly fashion the pretensions of England and France to regions which belonged to neither:—

"Wherever the French landed, they called the country their own; and the English took possession wherever they came, upon the same equitable pretensions. The harmless savages made no opposition; and, could the intruders have agreed together, they might peaceably have shared this desolate country between them; but they quarrelled about the boun-

daries of their settlements; about grounds and rivers to which neither side could show any other right than that of power, and which neither could occupy but by usurpation."

In other spheres of thought we find almost equal depth and originality. The essay *On the English Clergy, and Popular Preachers,* is unsurpassed of its kind, and the criticism of the attempt to make converts by appeals to reason shows sound psychology: "Reason is but a weak antagonist when headlong passion dictates, in all such cases we should arm one passion against another: it is with the human mind as in nature, from the mixture of two opposites the result is most frequently neutral tranquillity."

We even find this "inspired idiot" in the sphere of economics. The orthodox economists of the nineteenth century taught that the way to advance was to implant new desires. Goldsmith knew it before them. Speaking of the benefits of luxury in making a people wiser and happier, he says: "Examine the history of any country remarkable for opulence and wisdom, you will find they would never have been wise had they not been first luxurious; you will find poets, philosophers, and even patriots, marching in luxury's train. The reason is obvious. We then only are curious after knowledge, when we find it connected with sensual happiness. The senses ever point out the way, and reflection comments on the discovery." It would be easy to carp at this, and to point out that it is untrue to say that we are curious after knowledge *only* when it is connected with sensual happiness. "Here is to our next discovery, and may it do no good to anybody," is said to have been the toast at a meeting of *savants;* and whether the tale be true or not, it faithfully represents the intellectual detachment of the man of science. If Goldsmith had been writing a scientific treatise, he would doubtless have been more guarded; but though he has laid himself open to a superficial criticism, what

he says is sound at the core. It is true that the desire to gratify the senses was at the start, and remains still, one of the great causes of the activity of intellect. It must be admitted that Goldsmith was not always consistent. In a well-known couplet in *The Deserted Village* he insists upon the evil state of the land

> "Where wealth accumulates, and men decay."

And though this particular line may be explained in a sense consistent with the meaning of the essay in *The Citizen of the World*, the whole passage can hardly be so explained; nor can the argument with Johnson on the same subject, which is reported by Boswell. Goldsmith then was inconsistent. He never harmonised the phases of truth which he saw successively; but there were few men of his time who saw so many.

Perhaps, however, the most remarkable essay of all is that which tells the Eastern tale of Asem, and in doing so anticipates one of the profoundest philosophical theories of the nineteenth century. In all ages men have pondered the problem of evil, and it would be rash to say that they have solved it now. But at least it will be confessed that a solution which commended itself to Hegel, to Hawthorne and to Browning is worthy of attention. What, then, shall be said about the man who anticipated them all, and who, long before the earliest of them, taught the doctrine which marked them as among the most original minds of their time? This is what Goldsmith has done in the extraordinary essay entitled *Asem, an Eastern Tale; or a Vindication of the Wisdom of Providence in the Moral Government of the World*. The fact that this essay seems to have attracted no great attention is probably to be explained by its very originality.[1] Just as there were reformers before the world was ripe for reformation, so there may

[1] A reviewer in *Blackwood's Magazine*, volume 67, devotes much space to the essay, but simply to disagree with it, though he is on the whole appreciative of Goldsmith.

be philosophers before there are minds ready to grasp their thoughts.

Asem is an apologue inculcating the doctrine of the necessity of evil. Asem has spent a fortune in benevolence, and, reduced to poverty, he experiences the same ingratitude as Timon of Athens. He is about to destroy himself, when a Genius appears to him who conducts him to a world similar to the earth, except that it is peopled with rational beings free from vice. Asem finds these rational beings pursued by the inferior animals which they have deemed it unjust to destroy by force or fraud. There are no handsome houses or cities, because these would only increase their possessors' pride and the envy of others. Asem asks to be introduced to some of their wisest men: "'Wisdom!' replied his instructor, 'how *ridiculous! We have no wisdom here, for we have no* occasion for it; true wisdom is only a knowledge of our own duty and the duty of others to us; but of what use is such wisdom here? each intuitively performs what is right in himself, and expects the same from others. If by wisdom you should mean vain curiosity and empty speculation, as such pleasures have their origin in vanity, luxury, or avarice, we are too good to pursue them.'" There is no society, for "all societies are made either through fear or friendship," and there is no cause for fear and no difference in merit. Asem finds a wretch dying for want, because the inhabitants have never a single meal more than is necessary. They have no patriotism, for that is founded on the same selfish principle which leads a man to prefer his own interest to that of others. Nothing less than universal benevolence is free from vice. "'Strange!' cries the disappointed pilgrim, in an agony of distress; 'what sort of a world am I now introduced to? There is scarce a virtue, but that of temperance, which they practise; and in that they are no way superior to the very brute creation. There is scarce an amusement which they

enjoy; fortitude, liberality, friendship, wisdom, conversation, and love of country, all are virtues entirely unknown here: thus it seems, that, to be unacquainted with vice is not to know virtue. Take me, O my Genius, back to that very world which I have despised: a world which has Allah for its contriver is much more wisely formed than that which has been projected by Mahomet [this is the origin of the viceless world—it is made by Allah, because Mahomet disliked the vice of the other]. Ingratitude, contempt, and hatred, I can now suffer, for perhaps I have deserved them. When I arraigned the wisdom of Providence, I only showed my own ignorance; henceforth let me keep from vice myself, and pity it in others.' "

Surely this is far more profound than Addison's *Vision of Mirza*, or any other similar composition of the eighteenth century. Goldsmith is two or three generations before his time: we seem to hear the voice of Browning welcoming "the blessed evil," and condemning the "neutral best" of Rephan. If triteness of idea be the test, we can see how Addison may be provincial and Goldsmith "of the centre." The massive sense of Johnson is worthy of all honour; but Johnson is in every fibre a man of his own time, his intellect rarely reaches out, like Goldsmith's, to the future. There is nothing in *Rasselas* to rival the originality of *Asem*.

There is less need to demonstrate the other merits of Goldsmith, once the "inspired idiot" is out of the way, and the great original genius established in his stead. Everybody acknowledges the wonderful charm of his style. Everybody feels the humour of Beau Tibbs. There is but one opinion about the essay on Westminster Abbey, with its solemn beginning, its satire, embittered perhaps by personal reminiscence, on the "answerers of books," its excellent ridicule of the monuments of nobodies, and of the contemptible demand for pay to see the show, with the gate-keeper's answer: " 'As for your questions,' replied the gate-keeper, 'to be sure they

may be very right, for I don't understand them; but, as for that there threepence, I farm it from one—who rents it from another—who hires it from a third—who leases it from the guardians of the temple,—and we must all live.'" It is impossible to miss the humour of the Newgate prisoner's anxiety for the Englishman's prerogative, liberty, the porter's conviction that the French are only fit to carry burthens, and the soldier's zeal for religion, which is so impressive to the Chinaman: "May the devil sink me into flames, (such was the solemnity of his objurgation), if the French should come over, our religion would be utterly undone." It would be easy to multiply examples of this kind, to show that in his lighter vein Goldsmith is the equal of the best; the difficulty is rather to find where there is anything fit to set in the balance against the political and philosophic wisdom of his weightier papers. It is the "inspired idiot" theory that has prevented the general recognition of this; and it may be that, as Mr. Frankfort Moore maintains, the origin of that most unfortunate and most objectionable theory is to be found in an English (and Scottish) misunderstanding of Irish humour. If so, Goldsmith hoodwinked his contemporaries to the serious detriment of his own fame.

After Goldsmith the periodical essay was in decline, and no man of first-rate ability touched it—the periodical essay of the literary type, that is to say; for party men were active enough, and the warfare between Smollett in *The Briton* and Wilkes in *The North Briton* shows that political feeling could still enlist in its service the most eminent names in literature. Some of the old hands continued to write. Colman, in *The Genius* (1761–1762) and in *Terræ Filius* (1763), carried on the sort of work he had begun in *The Connoisseur*. New hands too were enlisted, and some of them were at least respectable. The *Essays Moral and Literary* (1778-1779) of Vicesimus Knox, though they were issued in volumes, possess all the character-

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istics of the periodical essay. Their popularity showed that they suited the taste of the time, and the fact that many of them may still be read with pleasure is a proof that they are compositions of distinct merit. *The Mirror* (1779–1780) brings us into contact with another new writer. Henry Mackenzie (1745–1831) is best known as the author of *The Man of Feeling*, the very name of which is apt to excite prejudice in an age which can hardly bear sentimentalism from any lesser men than Sterne and Goethe. But Scott tells us that Mackenzie was "gayest of the gay, though most sensitive of the sentimental;" and while *The Man of Feeling* is the work with which his name is usually associated, he is really at his best in his essays in *The Mirror* and its successor, *The Lounger* (1785–1787), to which also he was the principal contributor.

To win success with a periodical paper in a narrow society like that of Edinburgh in the eighteenth century was far more difficult than it would have been to do so in London; and in the concluding number of *The Mirror* Mackenzie showed that he was fully aware of the disadvantages under which he laboured. The popularity of this paper, therefore, and of *The Lounger*, is all the better testimony to their merits. Though they are not, of course, equal to the best of the London papers, they deserve a high place in the second class, and of Mackenzie's contributions it is not too much to say that a few of them will bear comparison with the best essays by the best essayists. The character of the man who is no one's enemy but his own is excellent, and so is the letter of Homespun on the great lady's visit, though the debt to *The Vicar of Wakefield* is too great. The paper on Burns (*Lounger*, No. 97) is most honourable to Mackenzie. But his masterpiece is the Godmother (*Lounger*, No. 87). Lamb himself could hardly have drawn more skilfully the picture of her home and character: "She had an excellent memory for anecdote; and her stories, though sometimes long, were never tiresome; for she had been a woman

of great beauty and accomplishment in her youth, and had kept such company as made the drama of her stories respectable and interesting. She spoke frequently of such of her own family as she remembered when a child, but scarcely ever of those she had lost, though one could see she thought of them often. She had buried a beloved husband and four children. Her youngest, Edward, 'her beautiful, her brave,' fell in Flanders, and was not entombed with his ancestors. His picture, done when a child, an artless red and white portrait, smelling at a nosegay, but very like withal, hung at her bedside, and his sword and gorget were crossed under it. When she spoke of a soldier, it was in a style above her usual simplicity; there was a sort of swell in her language, which sometimes a tear, for her age had not lost the privilege of tears, made still more eloquent. She kept her sorrows, like the devotions that solaced them, sacred to herself. They threw nothing of gloom over her deportment; a gentle shade only, like the fleckered clouds of summer, that increase, not diminish, the benignity of the season."

The Observer (1785–1790) held in its day the position in the south that *The Lounger* held in the north, and it introduces among the essayists the name of Richard Cumberland (1732–1811), who wrote it. Cumberland was famous in his time for plays which are now no longer read. Much of his *Observer* too is obsolete; but it is interesting in two ways. In the first place, it attests the reaction which was beginning against the style of Johnson. One of the papers is devoted to an examination of his style and *Addison's*, and it awards the palm to the latter. The second noteworthy feature is the element of narrative. This, in fact, constitutes the chief merit of *The Observer*. The story is akin to the drama, and in the latter Cumberland was a practised hand. His experience stood him in good stead, the less exacting conditions of the narrative suited him better than the more stringent ones of the stage,

and the result is that his tales are remarkably good. Perhaps the best is the story of Nicholas Pedrosa.

Witness to the reaction in favour of a simpler style than Johnson's is borne also by *The Microcosm* (1786–1787), an Etonian paper which would be worthy of note even apart from its quite considerable merits. In the opening number Gregory Griffin, as the editor called himself, says that in the miniature world of Eton the observer " may see the embryo statesman, who hereafter may wield and direct at pleasure the mighty and complex system of European Politics, now employing the whole extent of his abilities to circumvent his companions at their plays, or adjusting the important differences which may arise between the contending heroes of his little circle; or a general, the future terror of France and Spain, now the dread only of his equals, and the undisputed lord and president of the boxing-ring." So true is this that one of the principal writers to *The Microcosm* was Canning, destined afterwards to wield the whole power of the state; and though Arthur Wellesley had left a few years before, he had fought there " Bobus " Smith, another of the contributors, and conquered him as he afterwards conquered mightier foes. *The Microcosm* was not quite so happy in its assertion that " the Grays and Wallers of the rising generation here tune their little lyres." The authors of the *Lyrical Ballads* were not reared at Eton, nor were the other leaders of the revolutions in poetry, except Shelley, who was unborn in the day of *The Microcosm*. Still, the man to whom Byron owed the stanza of *Beppo* and *Don Juan* is not altogether negligible in the history of poetry; and John Hookham Frere too was a contributor to the Eton paper. There was abundance of talent in these young writers, and their periodical shows a maturity both of thought and of style which is surprising in view of their boyish years. At the same time, it cannot be pretended that their own merit would give these papers a permanent place in

literature. After the lapse of a century they are interesting not so much in themselves as for the after-history of the writers.

Drake continues his indispensable guidance till 1809; but of the fifty papers or more that he enumerates after *The Observer* only one had gained a place in the classical canon; and though Drake calls *The Looker-on* (1792-1794), by William Roberts, an "elegant and instructive work," it is so entirely a weak imitation of *The Spectator* as to be hardly readable at the present day. The periodical essay was dying. It had survived for a hundred years, some new paper from time to time rising by the merit of an unusually brilliant contributor or group of contributors above the mass of mediocre stuff. But change of circumstances made the decay now permanent. The novel was displacing the short story, and a new class of periodicals was springing up, a class catering, by a more complex organisation, for more varied needs.

Strictly, perhaps, it is only the writers of periodical essays who ought to be described as imitators of Steele and Addison; but in some degree all the essayists of the eighteenth century were indebted to them, and it will be convenient to notice here a few writers who have been passed over in tracing the line of the periodicals. The first in order is Henry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke (1678-1751). Like most writers of his time, Bolingbroke occasionally contributed to the periodical papers; but it is not for his essays in *The Examiner* and *The Craftsman* that he is remembered. In all his works it must be confessed that he is exceedingly disappointing. His skill is indisputable, and yet the modern reader is left wondering at the reputation he once enjoyed. He has nothing to commend him but style; and style, somehow, refuses to be divorced from substance, and loses its power to charm when it is so divorced. Bolingbroke has been praised by no less a critic than Lord Morley as ranking, "in all that musicians call execution, only below

the three or four highest masters of English prose." But the same writer adds that "of all the writing in our literature, his is the hollowest, the flashiest, the most insincere." And certainly the second pronouncement is required to qualify the first. As far as mere device of words and structure of sentence go, the praise, emphatic as it is, is probably deserved. But for really effective style something more is required. The decisive condemnation of Bolingbroke is that, faultless as his writings are when regarded analytically, hardly a sentence of his grips the mind and remains there—a thing which cannot be said of any writer who deserves to be called great. It can be said of none of Bolingbroke's more prominent contemporaries. Swift, Addison, Steele, Fielding have all written many things that refuse to be forgotten. So have his successors, Johnson and Goldsmith. In Bolingbroke memorable phrases like that about Ben Jonson—"He invades authors like a monarch; and what would be theft in other poets is only victory in him"—are the rarest things imaginable.

The reasons why Bolingbroke is so unsatisfactory are two. His thought is platitude. He makes a parade of philosophy, but gives expression to not one memorable principle, even in that sphere of politics with which he ought to have been familiar. Familiar with it in a sense he certainly was, but familiar with its trickery rather than its underlying principles. And hence he is best, not in a pretentious piece like *The Idea of a Patriot King*, but in the *Letter to Sir William Windham*, with its caustic criticism of the Pretender, and in the three papers, *The Occasional Writer*, satirising Walpole. Superficiality in philosophy might, however, be alleged against many who have nevertheless been effective essayists: Addison was not particularly profound, and still less was Steele. A more serious defect is the insincerity of Bolingbroke. This precludes that sense of contact with the man which atones for simplicity of thought, and sometimes even for triteness.

Under Bolingbroke's writings there beats no human heart at all. Take the *Reflections upon Exile*, founded upon and imitated from Seneca, or *Of the True Use of Study and Retirement*. Apart from all consideration of the life of Bolingbroke, the reader feels them to be conventional, hollow and insincere; but when the facts of his life are taken into account the sentiments professed become half ludicrous and wholly nauseous.

It is astonishing to read the character of such a man described by such a hand as Swift's, even though it was at an early stage of their acquaintance: "I think Mr. St. John the greatest young man I ever knew; wit, capacity, beauty, quickness of apprehension, good learning, and an excellent taste; the best orator in the House of Commons, admirable conversation, good nature, and good manners; generous, and a despiser of money. His only fault is talking to his friends in way of complaint of too great a load of business, which looks a little like affectation; and he endeavours too much to mix the fine gentleman and man of pleasure with the man of business. What truth and sincerity he may have I know not: he is now but thirty-two, and has been Secretary above a year." Surely this phœnix might have produced something better than he has left behind him. The younger Pitt too is said to have declared that of all lost pieces of literature he would most rejoice to recover a speech of Bolingbroke. As Bolingbroke's style is of a rhetorical cast, and as his besetting sins are less offensive in an oratorical dress than when otherwise expressed, it may well be that his speeches were better than his writings. But it is inconceivable that they were comparable in value to many of the lost treasures of literature. And the reason of the failure of a richly-gifted man was just the absence of that truth and sincerity concerning which Swift was unqualified to speak.

From Bolingbroke the shallowest to David Hume (1711

1776) the profoundest of British philosophers in the eighteenth century is a long step. But the greatness of Hume cannot be adequately shown here; for, in spite of his admirably lucid style, it is a greatness in philosophy more than in literature; and though he possessed some of the most engaging qualities of the essayist, he was too formal in his essays to show them freely. That he possessed such qualities is evident chiefly from his letters and from his admirable autobiography. These show the loathed and dreaded sceptic as one of the most amiable and honourably independent of men. In respect of independence he is not unworthy of comparison with Wordsworth himself, for he was as resolute as the poet to preserve by frugality his intellectual freedom.

Hume has put it on record that in his youth he was as much attracted towards *belles lettres* as towards philosophy; but, excellent as is his literary style, there can be little doubt that his choice of philosophy was fortunate. If he had devoted himself exclusively to pure literature, he would certainly have been far less original than he was in philosophy, and no revolution would have been associated with his name, as it is with that of the man who roused Kant from his "dogmatic slumber." Hume's literary tastes were wholly those of the eighteenth century. As regards appreciation of Shakespeare he was a Philistine of the Philistines. He was a great admirer of the French, and held that "with regard to the stage they have excelled even the Greeks, who far excelled the English." He admired that extraordinary epic, *The Epigoniad* of Wilkie; and though friendship may in this instance have led his judgment astray, he is so purely 'classical,' in the eighteenth-century meaning of the word, that we who have been touched by romance can sympathise with Coleridge's contempt for his literary judgments.

Nevertheless, it is impossible not to regret that Hume did not infuse a larger portion of the literary, in another sense

than the critical, into his essays. One great section of these are simply the *Treatise of Human Nature* boiled down and rewritten with the more skilful pen of a writer now experienced. They are an integral part of philosophy. Others are described as "moral, political and literary." It is here principally that the Hume with whom we are concerned shows himself, and here we may legitimately regret that the literary element is not predominant. The whole atmosphere is philosophical, and though the style is such as philosophers—English philosophers at least—have rarely written, we should hardly suspect that the essays were written by a man who had been at any time equally interested in things literary. They reveal a mind extraordinarily keen to detect fallacy and fertile of profound suggestions drawn from philosophy and history. A few sentences expose the fallacy of the arguments that friendship cannot be disinterested, and that the virtuous are virtuous for the sake of praise. A single sentence in the essay *Of the Liberty of the Press* condenses the result of much reading and much reflection; and it is a result worthy of attention in these days of triumphant and confident democracy: "It will be found, if I mistake not, a true observation in politics, that the two extremes in government, liberty and slavery, commonly approach nearest to each other." Sometimes Hume's illustrations combine simplicity and aptness in a remarkable degree and clinch an argument so that there is no more to be said. In the essay *Of Eloquence* he is arguing that where a number of men are nearly equal the fact of their equality is probably due to their mediocrity, and he goes on: "A hundred cabinet-makers in London can work a table or a chair equally well, but no one poet can write verses with such spirit and elegance as Mr. Pope."

Hume in a confidential moment explains his own method, and reveals the secret of his effectiveness in argument and of the great influence he exercised in several fields—in

metaphysics, in economics and in political speculation. "When I am present," he says, "at any dispute, I always consider with myself, whether it be a question of comparison or not that is the subject of the controversy; and if it be, whether the disputants compare the same objects together, or talk of things that are wholly different." The most famous of all Hume's essays is that on miracles. It was this, even more than the profoundly sceptical character of his philosophy, that made his a name of fear to his contemporaries; because comparatively few could understand the argument about cause, while all could follow, more or less, the reasoning on miracles. It proceeds on precisely the principle laid down above. The matter is a question of comparison between the weight to be assigned to human testimony and that to be attributed to the conjoint experience of mankind as to the uniformity of the laws of nature. Hume's contention that the latter must always outweigh the former made a profound impression at the time. To the modern man of science it is less satisfactory. We may take Huxley as representative, and Huxley's view is that human testimony, if it be only sufficient in quantity and satisfactory in quality, will not only shake but overthrow any 'law' based on experience. It is less generally recognised that the argument of the essay is inconsistent with the fundamental principle of Hume's own philosophy. If cause itself is only invariable sequence, how can we refuse to credit a concurrence of testimony to the fact that the sequence has ceased to be invariable? Unconsciously, Hume had gone back to that 'necessity' which he had before rejected, and argued very much as if there was something in nature irrevocably fixed and immutably certain.

The storm that broke over Hume's head on one occasion threatened his life, if we may believe the story of the woman who refused to pull him out of a bog-hole until he had repeated the Lord's Prayer; but it produced nothing worth remember-

ing in literature. James Beattie (1735–1803) was supposed to have refuted him by his *Essay on Truth*, and Johnson, as well as smaller men, lavished praise upon the author. But the *Essay on Truth* and the other essays collected under Beattie's name are hardly true essays, they are rather short treatises, chiefly on questions of rhetoric and criticism, and they are elegant—a favourite word of the time—rather than strong or very original. Except for *The Minstrel*, Beattie is practically forgotten. Not so Junius. But in his case it is mystery, not literary merit, that keeps the famous *Letters* alive. Who was Junius? Nobody knows, and, unless some new document is found and settles the question, nobody ever will know. Human ingenuity has been so lavishly spent upon the problem that it is safe to assume that mere reasoning will never solve it. All that can be said is that it is highly probable that Sir Philip Francis was the man. The problem of authorship is difficult enough to satisfy any one who has a taste for such difficulties. But the student of literature who turns to the *Letters* which have occasioned all the argument is bitterly disappointed. The style is artificial and pretentious. The subjects dealt with have interest for the historian, but little for the lover of literature as such; and the spirit in which they are treated can hardly be too strongly condemned.

CHAPTER VII

THE TRANSITION FROM THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

"HE inherits more of the spirit of Steele than any man since his time." Such is the opinion pronounced in *Table-Talk* by Hazlitt about Leigh Hunt; and if there be any doubt about its soundness, it can only be with respect to the eighteenth-century imitators of Steele. If we limit ourselves to the nineteenth century, it is clear that Leigh Hunt has more affinity to the Queen Anne essayists than any contemporary or successor. The close association of Hazlitt himself with Hunt in some of the enterprises in which this affinity was shown makes it convenient to take the two together, and to treat them as the writers who illustrate the transition from the characteristic manner of the eighteenth century.

Leigh Hunt (1784–1859) was a literary man-of-all-work, whose struggles for a livelihood fill an interesting and not unimportant chapter in the history of literature. Like Steele, he was important not only, perhaps not even chiefly, for what he himself wrote, but also for what he occasioned others to write. Like Steele, he was extraordinarily and indeed culpably improvident. It is difficult to pardon his dealings with his friends in the matter of money. In one year he borrowed from Shelley £1400, which he never repaid. On the contrary, he borrowed further sums, and left these likewise unpaid. Yet the generous lender, in the dedication of *The Cenci*, calls him "gentle, honourable, innocent and brave." There were two sides to the character of Hunt; a side which won the love of such men as Shelley and Lamb, and another which is pardonable only on the supposition that he was in

[illegible] But [illegible] in some of the [illegible] the denial. [illegible] lively and [illegible] "[illegible] a good man and [illegible]—a good [illegible]—a good friend—see [illegible]—and a great coxcomb and a [illegible] everything about him." Hunt brought [illegible] of this letter, which contains [illegible] the phrases just quoted; for [illegible] the part dealing with Hunt, [illegible] of the tone of Hunt's book [illegible] *Contemporaries*, with [illegible] said is that Hunt himself [illegible]

[illegible] with Hazlitt, he started *The Examiner* [illegible] the discussion of politics, [illegible] For about thirty years, Hunt was [illegible] journalists, playing in his time [illegible] periodicals. About two years after *The Examiner* [illegible] *The Reflector* (1810–1811), a quarterly magazine [illegible] with politics as well as literature, for which Lamb [illegible] as well as Hunt. But Hunt's politics [illegible] those days were not altogether safe. He was charged with libelling the Prince Regent in *The Examiner* and was imprisoned for two years. The most serious consequences of the case, however, were the expenses in which it involved Hunt and his brother; and these sat lightly enough on a person of Hunt's peculiar ideas on questions of *meum* and *tuum*. The imprisonment did [illegible]

rupt his literary work, while it gave him a prominence to attain which he must otherwise have worked for years. Some time after his release he made a notable new development in *The Examiner*. He planned a series of papers in conscious imitation of *The Spectator* and *The Tatler*, and these papers were published in *The Examiner* under the title of *The Round Table*. But circumstances caused the plan to be modified, and made the resemblance to the Queen Anne writers less close than it was meant to be. Hazlitt has related how the landing of Napoleon from Elba dissolved the Round Table and drew the attention of the editor from the characteristic part of the work to politics. Thus it came about that *The Round Table*, as it was actually executed, was mainly the work of Hazlitt, and that it consists principally of literary criticism.

Before the close of his editorship of *The Examiner* Hunt had started *The Indicator*, which lived for about a year and a half, from the autumn of 1819 to the spring of 1821. The title was taken from "a bird of that name, who shows people where to find wild honey," and it is a better guide to the contents than most titles. The editor flattered himself, with a characteristic touch of vanity, that there was "nothing temporary whatsoever in it." It was followed by *The Liberal* (1822–1823), in which Hunt was associated with Byron and Shelley. Then came *The Literary Examiner* (1823), and, after a few years, *The Companion* (1828), which was practically a revival of *The Indicator*. It is the two last-named periodicals which make Hunt pre-eminently the nineteenth-century embodiment of the Queen Anne spirit. A little later still, Hunt figures as a sort of nineteenth-century Defoe, editing and himself writing for more than a year a daily paper, *The Tatler* (1830–1832). Even Defoe had at no time issued more than five numbers of the *Review* a week—great and little together. Hunt had not Defoe's marvellous abundance, the strain was too great, and his health was seriously shaken.

He was never afterwards capable of such exertions, and for the remaining twenty-one years of his life his writings were at any rate less copious, whatever may be thought of their quality.

Besides all this activity in journalism on his own responsibility, Hunt was a contributor to several periodicals, in particular to *The New Monthly Magazine* and, after Macvey Napier had succeeded Jeffrey, to *The Edinburgh Review*. Napier was something of a pedant and objected to the colloquialism of Hunt's style. The mediation of Macaulay, who had a kindly feeling for Hunt and thought that there was merit in the colloquialism, was needed to keep the peace between the editor and his contributor.

The quality of Leigh Hunt's work may be judged from *Men, Women and Books*, *A Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla* and *Imagination and Fancy*, which are volumes gathered from his journalistic essays. A great deal remains uncollected, much of it, doubtless, not worth collecting; but some, especially what appeared in *The Indicator*, is in its own way excellent. These papers are partly essays in literary criticism, and partly personal essays flavoured by reminiscences of the Queen Anne writers.

As a critic Hunt presents those puzzling incongruities which so strongly marked the men of his time with hardly any exception but Lamb. On the one hand, it has often been claimed for him that he was perhaps the first critic to do justice to Shelley and Keats. And this is true. Yet, on the other hand, it cannot be called less than strange that the editor of *The Examiner* allowed the death of Keats to pass without notice. Further, it has to be remembered that Hunt is not always to be judged by the final form of his utterances. Notwithstanding the admiration he afterwards professed for Wordsworth and Coleridge, in *The Feast of the Poets*, as it originally appeared in *The Reflector*, he declares that Words-

worth's second childhood had followed close on the first, and makes Apollo, between anger and mirth, ask whether there were ever such asses on earth as the two of them. Scott was abused as well. Was it a pure accident that all the three poets thus reviled were Tories? It seems possible that when the chief of the Cockney School, as Hunt was thought to be, was attacked by *Blackwood*, he was only hoist with a petard similar to his own, though, it may be, even more evil-smelling. The *virus* of party would seem to have attacked Hunt as well as his opponents. There is one other failing to remember as against the praise which some have showered upon Hunt's criticism. That vulgarity with which Byron charged him affected the mind as well as the manners, and it is the secret of the extraordinary coincidence of expression as well as feeling which Lang has noted between Keats, Hunt's friend, and Lockhart his enemy, as we may not unfairly call the *Blackwood* reviewer. Each, in identical words, and doubtless without knowledge the one of the other, charges Hunt with making "beautiful things hateful." It is a very severe condemnation of any critic. The first impulse is to recoil from it; for the edited and expurgated Hunt is often highly attractive. But the second and better thought is to try to explain it; and the explanation seems to lie in Hunt's vulgarity. We can see traces of this even in the edited volumes; and the fault is more conspicuous in the unedited essays. Hunt was a sentimentalist—there is a hint of this too in the quotation from Byron; and, like other sentimentalists, he was apt to overdo things, to be mawkish. By the very type of his intellect he tended to reduce the beautiful to the pretty. We need not sympathise with the virulent condemnation pronounced upon the poem by Lockhart in order to see something of this in *The Story of Rimini*. Contrast it with the stern simplicity of the passage in Dante on which it is founded, and at once the sentimentalist, the devotee of the

pretty, is apparent. What Hunt exhibited in his own works he not unnaturally admired in the works of others. This jarred upon the fastidious mind of Lockhart and shocked the Greek taste of Keats.

Yet it would be unjust to leave the impression that Hunt *as a critic is deserving merely of censure.* On the contrary, within his own limits and for purposes simply of appreciation, he is admirable. Those who have lavished praise on his criticism have been wrong only in neglecting the other side. In order to strike the just mean it is necessary to remember two things: first, that where any sort of prejudice is roused Hunt's judgment is worthless. Hence the censures of *The Feast of the Poets*. He was no worse than his contemporaries, but neither was he any better. The second point to remember is that in censure, even when it is unprejudiced, Hunt is seldom happy. The reason is that though he makes a show of reasoning he merely feels. He was singularly sensitive, and so when he trusted feeling he was almost invariably right. This is the secret of the charm of such of his critical work as remains still easily accessible. Hunt communicates to the reader his own happy enjoyment. He has an atmosphere of genial good-nature. The partisan is forgotten; he was never the real Hunt; it was the force of circumstances rather than predilection that made him play the part. He does himself justice only when he forgets that he has a part to play; and it is then that we get glimpses of the man whom Shelley and Lamb loved, and on whom Carlyle and Macaulay looked at least with friendly eye.

The other side of Leigh Hunt's work is more important for the present purpose. For the last century we have had many critics, but comparatively few essayists who could and would be confidential. Hunt was so always; it was his nature, and "*nature will out,*" *even in criticism. But there are degrees;* and, while the man Hunt is never far in the background, there

are essays—many in *The Indicator* and *The Companion*, some in most of the collections—in which he comes prominently into the foreground. Such essays are his most pleasing productions. The *Autobiography*, so readable, so likeable, sometimes so unconsciously amusing, may be regarded as an enlarged essay of the sort. It is this intimacy which gives charm to those favourites of Lamb, the papers on *Coaches and their Horses* and the pathetic one on the *Deaths of Little Children*. There are reminders of Lamb himself in such papers. The likeness is very striking in that admirable one, the *Inside of an Omnibus*, in *Men, Women, and Books*. We seem to be reading Lamb himself when Hunt calls the omnibus "the man-of-war among coaches,—the whale's back in the metropolitan flood," and when he goes on, "We cannot say much for the beauty of the omnibus; but there is a certain might of utility in its very bulk, which supersedes the necessity of beauty, as in the case of the whale itself, or in the idea that we entertain of Dr. Johnson who shouldered porters as he went, and 'laughed like a rhinoceros.'" Hunt's kindly humanity is pleasantly illustrated in the remarks on an imprisoned eagle in *A Visit to the Zoological Gardens*; the very spirit of the country is in *The Month of May*; and it would be hard to conceive a better rendering in words of the impression produced by a hot day in summer than that which he gives in *A Now*. Evidently it was a sound instinct that turned Hunt for a model to the Queen Anne essayists; for the qualities he displays are much the same as theirs. But there is a difference in the proportions in which the ingredients are mingled. Addison and Steele were almost wholly men of the town; Hunt was a man of the town too; but he was by nature, and he never ceased to be, a man of the country as well. Hence articles such as those last mentioned are far more frequent in his case than in theirs, while articles on the follies of the town and the fripperies of fashion are less frequent.

One thing Hunt lacked which was requisite to make him a great essayist—mass and weight of thought. It is a defect which is apparent in every essayist of his class, but in Addison less than in Hunt. Pleasant as much of the latter's writing is, the texture is thin; and this weakness will probably in the long run be fatal to him. Light literature, like light wine, does not keep long. Nor will Hunt's style permanently save him. It is an easy and agreeable but not a great style. Sometimes its colloquialism, right enough for the purpose in view, verges on excess, and the reader is tempted to call it an illustration of Hunt's vulgarity. Napier actually used the word, but it was unjust; at least it would be unjust as applied to Hunt's habitual style, however it might be defended as descriptive of particular phrases. Homely and chatty rather are the words descriptive of this facile talk in which the writer makes a friend of the reader and a companion in all the meanderings of his thought.

A very different and a much greater man was Hunt's coadjutor and friend William Hazlitt (1778–1830), one of those who stand in the very front rank of English essayists, one who, but for the far larger proportion of ordinary matter he has left, might almost challenge comparison with Lamb himself. But because he is much less uniform in excellence, and still more because we often detect in Hazlitt a flavour of bitterness in place of the sweet humanity which gives Lamb that ineffable charm, his place must be decidedly lower. Decidedly lower, yet higher than that which he yet enjoys.

In order to make it clear from the start that in Hazlitt we have to deal with a man hardly less emphatically an essayist by temperament than are Montaigne and Lamb, it may be well to quote from Hazlitt near the end of his career. In *A Farewell to Essay-writing* he embodies, probably of set purpose, the innermost essentials of that temperament. The personal note, the intimate confidence, the weaving of all elements,

reading, observation, disposition, into one web of experience—all this is seen and heard in a single passage:—

"What a walk is this to me! I have no need of book or companion—the days, the hours, the thoughts of my youth are at my side, and blend with the air that fans my cheek. Here I can saunter for hours, bending my eye forward, stopping and turning to look back, thinking to strike off into some less trodden path, yet hesitating to quit the one I am in, afraid to snap the brittle threads of memory. I remark the shining trunks and slender branches of the birch trees, waving in the idle breeze; or a pheasant springs up on whirring wing; or I recall the spot where I once found a wood-pigeon at the foot of a tree, weltering in its gore, and think how many seasons have flown since 'it left its little life in air.' Dates, names, faces come back—to what purpose? Or why think of them now? Or rather why not think of them oftener? We walk through life, as through a narrow path, with a thin curtain drawn around it; behind are ranged rich portraits, airy harps are strung—yet we will not stretch forth our hand and lift aside the veil, to catch glimpses of the one, or sweep the chords of the other. As in a theatre, when the old-fashioned green curtain drew up, groups of figures, fantastic dresses, laughing faces, rich banquets, stately columns, gleaming vistas appeared beyond; so we have only at any time to 'peep through the blanket of the past,' to possess ourselves at once of all that has regaled our senses, that is stored up in our memory, that has struck our fancy, that has pierced out hearts: yet to all this we are indifferent, insensible, and seem intent only on the present vexation, the future disappointment."

It was long, however, before Hazlitt reached so high a point as this, where for wealth of intellect and imagination and for nervous English he is the rival of the greatest. He himself says, strangely, "an improving poet never becomes a

great one." He forgets Shakespeare, though he criticised him so often and so well; for up to the middle of his career Shakespeare was an improving poet, if ever there was one. He forgets himself; for, though he was not a poet, there are poetic qualities all through the work of Hazlitt, as there are in the passage just quoted; and we have his own word for it that his power of expression was of slow growth. It is true he was precocious, and wrote well enough at thirteen to be accepted by a newspaper. But in the essay *On Public Opinion* he says with truth that his writings are not "so properly the works of an author by profession, as the thoughts of a metaphysician expressed by a painter;" and again: "Till I began to paint, or till I became acquainted with the author of *The Ancient Mariner*, I could neither write nor speak." Still more emphatic testimony to the influence of Coleridge is borne by *My First Acquaintance with Poets* [1]

Such then is the genesis and such the character of the style of Hazlitt. He started a metaphysician, accustomed to meditate "on Fate, Free Will, Foreknowledge absolute." Encouraged by Coleridge he wrote his first book, a philosophical one; and it was as hard and dry as the hardest and driest treatise of the Scottish school—infinitely harder and drier than that *Treatise of Human Nature*, whose superiority to the essays of its author Hazlitt was one of the first to appreciate. The latter are by comparison, he says, "mere elegant trifling, light summer reading." Then the metaphysician becomes a painter, and colour and glow are added to the style. Most of this work had been done before Hazlitt began to write the essays by which he is now known; but still, within the period of the writings which are read to this day there is ample evidence of that improvement which he deemed

[1] And yet it appears that Hazlitt wrote the highly objectionable article about Coleridge in *The Edinburgh Review*, 1816 Verily the ways of the critics of the early nineteenth century are past finding out.

the mark of mediocrity, at least in poets. If a list of favourite essays were drawn out, a very large percentage of them would be found to belong to the last decade of Hazlitt's life.

Early in his career Hazlitt was associated with Cobbett, to whose *Register* he contributed letters in reply to Malthus. The two men were united by common political principles, and both in particular hated and tried to despise Malthus. But the personal relations between them were slight: Hazlitt says that he saw Cobbett only once. Far more important was the connexion between Hazlitt and Hunt. Much of Hazlitt's best work was done for periodicals of which the latter was, or had been, editor. His connexion with *The Examiner*, to which he continued to contribute after Hunt had ceased to be editor, was specially important. Among periodicals outside the Hunt group, he contributed to *The New Monthly Magazine*, *The Edinburgh Review*, and, from its foundation in 1820, to the memorable *London Magazine*.

Hazlitt's essays, like Hunt's, are divisible into two classes—essays in literary criticism, and essays on miscellaneous subjects, the latter being often of an intimate and personal nature. In both spheres Hazlitt stands very high; in both he is distinguished above all for just that quality which Hunt lacked—virility. As a critic he is hardly surpassed in English, unless it be by Coleridge and Lamb, both of whom had the indescribable and incommunicable power of divination, the highest and rarest of all critical gifts, which Hazlitt lacked. He achieves his ends in criticism by virtue of a sound but not an inspired taste, an understanding of ultra-masculine strength, trained powers of reasoning and a most incisive style. He had thus the two gifts, of which Hunt possessed only one. These critical gifts are displayed in two volumes of essays—*Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* and *The Spirit of the Age*, and also in three volumes of lectures which have much the character of essays—*Lectures on the English Poets*

Lectures on the English Comic Writers, and *Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*. In Elizabethan criticism Hazlitt must yield to both Lamb and Coleridge. He had not steeped himself in the literature as they had. Of course he knew Shakespeare thoroughly, and the *Characters* are drawn with penetrating skill; but he had far less of the illuminating sympathy in the light of which the other two worked. This, indeed, is Hazlitt's defect throughout, and not merely—naturally not even chiefly—in the criticism of the Elizabethans. There was acid in his nature, of which from time to time a drop exudes and blurs the lines. "No man," says Carlyle, "can pronounce dogmatically, with even a chance of being right, on the faults of a poem, till he has seen its very best and highest beauty." But this best and highest beauty is visible only to the sympathetic critic, never to the acidulous. Hazlitt's bitterness gives his criticism a hard tone. His sentences fall like blows of the hammer on the anvil. He is compelling, not winning. If he gains the victory, it is a victory of the intellect rather than the emotions; while, if the reader starts with a prepossession against the conclusion towards which he is working, the victory will probably not be gained at all. The sun and not the wind conquered the cloaked traveller. On the other hand, it is written that the violent take the kingdom of heaven by force; and Hazlitt's strength is so superb that not unfrequently he gains his end by violence.

In some measure Hazlitt's Elizabethan criticism has been superseded by subsequent criticism, though much of the work of that powerful intellect can never be superseded. It is individual. Scholarship advances, and in mere knowledge the present is superior to the past; but only a new Hazlitt could do again and do better that into which Hazlitt put *himself*. But among his critical writings we see this in the highest degree in the *English Comic Writers* and in *The Spirit*

of the Age; in the former because it was Hazlitt's special subject; in the latter, notwithstanding some blurs from the acid, because it was written by Hazlitt at the very acme of his powers and dealt with subjects his interest in which could not fail to be personal. No critical document more instructive has come down to us. Every judgment it contains is worthy of careful consideration, though not all are likely to be accepted now. But the instruction is hardly less from what is omitted than from what is included. It is one of the enigmas of the criticism of the period that there is no essay on Shelley or on Keats. Had the author been Jeffrey or Lockhart there would have been little cause for surprise; but how are we to explain such omissions on the part of a leader of the romantic school of criticism—of a member, moreover, of that so-called Cockney School, to which Keats also was supposed to belong?

Judged by what it contains, *The Spirit of the Age* is open to the criticism that it shows the prejudice which is the special danger of the criticism of contemporaries, as well as that acidity already noted. For illustration of the former it is sufficient to contrast the articles on Gifford and on Jeffrey. The severity with which the former is treated was, in Hazlitt, natural and excusable. There is, moreover, much truth in the criticism. But assuredly the essay was not written in a judicial spirit. It is prejudiced, a personal grudge is as gall in the ink. Jeffrey certainly deserved better than Gifford; but from Hazlitt Jeffrey gets more generous treatment than is accorded to men who are unquestionably superior in turn to him. But, for the purposes of literature, Gifford was the *Quarterly* and Jeffrey was the *Edinburgh*, and the organs are contrasted as well as the men. Here it is that the obliquity of Hazlitt's vision is betrayed.

"In *The Edinburgh Review* the talents of those on the opposite side are always extolled *pleno ore*,—in *The Quarterly*

Review they are denied altogether, and the justice that is i
this way withheld from them is compensated by a proportion
able supply of personal abuse A man of genius who is a lord,
and who publishes with Mr. Murray, may now and then stand
as good a chance as a lord who is not a man of genius and who
publishes with Messrs. Longman: but that is the utmost
extent of the impartiality of the *Quarterly*. From its account
you would take Lord Byron and Mr Stuart Rose for two very
pretty poets, but Mr. Moore's Magdalen Muse is sent to Bride-
well without mercy, to beat hemp in silk stockings. In the
Quarterly nothing is regarded but the political creed or external
circumstances of a writer, in the *Edinburgh* nothing is ever
adverted to but his literary merits Or if there is bias of
any kind, it arises from an affectation of magnanimity and
candour in giving heaped measure to those on the aristo-
cratic side in politics, and in being critically severe on others."
The critic of the critics doth protest too much. It would
have been wiser to admit the existence of a few spots in the
sun; the reader is put upon his guard by the unmeasured
praise for impartiality of an organ written almost wholly by
Whigs, and an unqualified condemnation of a rival organ
written almost wholly by Tories. It is the extreme of the
partisan spirit to see nothing but stainless white on one side
and only the blackness of the pit on the other. Clearly Hazlitt
will prove no safe guide where party prejudice can enter.

Evidences of the bitterness of Hazlitt are to be found every-
where. They are so frequent as to give a tone to the whole
of his criticism, and they leave the impression of a certain
want of generosity It is true he awards praise as well as
censure, but there is hardly an essay in *The Spirit of the Age*
which would be described as warm-hearted, unless it be the
one or two devoted to Leigh Hunt. Even where Hazlitt's
prejudices incline him to favour the writer he is criticising,
he generally qualifies his approval so as to make it hardly

palatable to the subject of it. Thus he does more than justice to Sir James Mackintosh, but his panegyric is almost annulled by the remark that there was nothing original in him. "Mr. Mackintosh's Lectures," he says, "were after all but a kind of philosophical centos. They were profound, brilliant, new to his hearers; but the profundity, the brilliancy, the novelty were not his own. He was like Dr. Pangloss (not Voltaire's, but Coleman's), who speaks only in quotations; and the pith, the marrow, of Sir James's reasoning and rhetoric at that memorable period might be put within inverted commas." Or take again the essays on Coleridge and on Wordsworth. Though the critic is conscious that the poets are men of high endowment, there is something grudging in the acknowledgment, and there is no stint when he comes to pointing out defects. Even though most of the defects are real, a more generous man would either not have pointed them out at all, or he would have contrived a different way of doing so. Truth is good, but not all truth at all times; and allusions to Wordsworth as "the spoiled child of disappointment," or to Coleridge's opium habit, are in bad taste: "Alas! 'Frailty, thy name is *Genius!*'—What is become of all this mighty heap of hope, of thought, of learning, and humanity? It has ended in swallowing doses of oblivion and in writing paragraphs in the *Courier*.—Such and so little is the mind of man!"

He who wishes to understand why, notwithstanding drawbacks so serious, Hazlitt remains unsurpassed in English criticism except by Coleridge and Lamb—perhaps, if allowance be made for the mass of his work, unsurpassed by any—has only to turn to the splendid paragraph immediately preceding this quotation—where, through two pages before we reach a full stop, in English crystal-clear though loaded with thought and rich with colour, Hazlitt traces the history of Coleridge's mind from his absorption in the system of Hartley. Who else could have written it? Here, in the proverbial nutshell, are the

ingredients of Hazlitt's criticism, the secret of his greatness, notwithstanding the defect personal and the defect due to the time which have just been noted. In the first place, we see in the passage referred to the value of that training in philosophy with which Hazlitt began. In this respect he had no rival but Coleridge; and while Coleridge lost himself in the maze Hazlitt remained master of himself and of his subject. A knowledge of philosophy is an accomplishment indispensable in the critic who would follow Coleridge; but it served Hazlitt well in many another case where the need was less obvious. To this training is due also at least a part of that copiousness of intellect which marks Hazlitt in all his work. The other side of his mind is seen in his mastery of metaphor and fertility in illustration. Here the artist joins hands with the metaphysician, and it is the union of the two which makes not only Hazlitt the critic but Hazlitt in the whole of his literary compass.

Even better than the critical essays are the miscellaneous essays of Hazlitt. Here, too, the aggregate bulk is great, and the quality of the best is excellent. Of *The Round Table* much is critical, but much also belongs to the miscellaneous class—part philosophical in the easy Addisonian fashion, part practical; for so no doubt Hazlitt would have considered the essay *On the Causes of Methodism*—a sect for which he shared Sydney Smith's dislike, and against which he wrote with wit more effective because more restrained than Smith's. But his best writings in this class are to be found in the collections now entitled *Table Talk, Sketches and Essays* and *Winterslow*. One of the secrets of his charm is the variety of his interests, which is illustrated compendiously in *Merry England*. Books of all sorts, politics, sports and games, prize-fighting, pictures and the stage—Hazlitt knows about them all, likes them all, has wisdom and wit to utter with regard to all. He is as zealous about the champion of the games of fives as about a

great poet, and in these days would have had an extensive knowledge of "records." He was alive to the shortcomings of the man who limited his interest to books, and wrote pungently on the ignorance of the learned. Were he living now, he would be among those educational reformers who insist that the most serious defect of our system is that it is too bookish. He liked to satirise men of one idea. A philosopher himself, he yet saw as clearly as any one the absurdity of dragging formal philosophy into everything. "Some," he says, "descant on the Kantean philosophy. There is a conceited fellow about town who talks always and everywhere on this subject. He wears the Categories round his neck like a pearl-chain; he plays off the names of the primary and transcendental qualities like rings on his fingers. He talks of the Kantean system while he dances; he talks of it while he dines, he talks of it to his children, to his apprentices, to his customers." Elsewhere he remarks that "he must be a poor creature indeed whose practical convictions do not in almost all cases outrun his deliberate understanding."

Hazlitt knew well the charm of snatches of autobiography, and has given many. *My first Acquaintance with Poets* is wholly of this character, and *Of Persons one would wish to have seen*, its successor among the *Winterslow* essays, partakes of it, though there we learn more about Lamb than about Hazlitt. We have it again in the admirable essay *On Living to One's Self*, and another phase in the no less admirable one *On a Sun-Dial*, as well as in that *Farewell to Essay-writing*, already quoted. Almost everywhere, in short, we have such revelations. He pictures his father, he tells us the reason why he himself is "irreclaimably of the old school in painting," he reveals tastes and pursuits in a quotation modified for his own ends—"if thou hast not seen the Louvre thou art damned." The most serious phases of his mind are brought to light in the more philosophical essays. His stubbornness

and tenacity of view appear in the essay *On Consistency of Opinion.* "I would quarrel," he says, "with the best friend I have sooner than acknowledge the absolute right of the Bourbons. I see Mr. Northcote seldomer than I did, because I cannot agree with him about the *Catalogue Raisonné.* I remember once saying to this gentleman, a great while ago, that I did not seem to have altered any of my ideas since I was sixteen years old." *On the Past and Future* reveals the man who, notwithstanding his intense interest in the present, lives in the past: "What is it in fact that we recur to oftenest? What subjects do we think or talk of? Not the ignorant future but the well-stored past."

Northcote had an effective retort to the extraordinary statement just quoted as to the fixity of Hazlitt's ideas: "Why then, you are no wiser now than you were then;" and Hazlitt's attempt at a reply is not very successful. No doubt what he said about himself indicated a real weakness; but *if it had* been the whole truth he would have been "a poor creature indeed." In point of fact it is true mainly of the understanding—opinions as to the absolute right of the Bourbons, and so on,—and Hazlitt himself bears witness that he who does not go beyond that is negligible. And if his opinions remained unchanged, his effective mastery of them and his power of expounding them were incomparably greater at forty than they were at sixteen.

Hazlitt is one of the masters of aphorism. We see this power constantly in his essays—a pregnancy of expression, where a single sentence would bear expansion into an essay, as in the saying, "common sense is tacit reason." But of course the place where such condensed wisdom is most frequent is the *Characteristics*, a collection which gives its author a place beside Ben Jonson and Bacon and Halifax, though somewhat lower than these. He could also be copious, though never verbose. When in the mood—though this was rare—

he could be extremely effective in grotesque portraiture. "Look at Sir William ——. Calipash and calipee are written in his face: he rolls about his unwieldy bulk in a sea of turtle-soup. How many haunches of venison does he carry on his back! He is larded with jobs and contracts; he is stuffed and swelled out with layers of bank-notes, and invitations to dinner! His face hangs out a flag of defiance to mischance: the roguish twinkle in his eye with which he lures half the city and beats Alderman —— hollow, is a smile reflected from unsunned gold! Nature and Fortune are not so much at variance as to differ about this fellow. To enjoy the good the Gods provide us is to deserve it. Nature meant him for a Knight, Alderman, and City-Member; and Fortune laughed to see the goodly person and prospects of the man!" If this were read in *Henry IV.*, it would be held worthy of the context. And yet one masterly touch of Sydney Smith's on the same character surpasses it all: "A cayman has sometimes come out of the Oroonoque, at Angustura, near the public walks where the people were assembled, seized a full-grown man, *as big as Sir William Curtis after dinner*, and hurried him into the bed of the river for his food."

It is obvious that the relations between Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt were external, or at least that they did not imply similarity of mind and character. Hunt liked and admired Hazlitt, and Hazlitt liked Hunt well enough to suppress the contempt which probably mingled with his liking. They worked so much together that it is impossible to disjoin their names; but to speak of them as members of the same 'school' is to misuse words even more seriously than they are misused in the similar conjunction of Southey with Wordsworth As a critic Hazlitt was nearly everything Hunt was not He built, as we have seen, on a firm foundation of the intellect, while Hunt's criticism was essentially emotional, and was untrustworthy whenever it attempted to be something

different. (Nor could [illegible] theirs—on the one hand [illegible] almost garrulous; on the other [illegible] tences expressing the [illegible] times by a single word [illegible]

There was one other [illegible] spirit of the eighteenth century [illegible] sufficient skill to deserve notice. This was [illegible] of which the [illegible] was Winthrop Mackworth Praed (1802–1839), who was assisted by Henry Nelson Coleridge, John Moultrie, and several others who afterwards won some measure of fame. They, and especially Praed, take many hints from the Queen Anne essayists, both for subjects and for manner of treatment. *On the Practical Bathos*, *Not at Home*, and *Mr. Lendle's Essay on Weathercocks* are all essays in the old manner. They are bright with wit, and it might have been expected that their author, when he reached the maturity of his powers, would take high rank among essayists. It can hardly be said that Praed's subsequent contributions to *Knight's Quarterly* and *The London Magazine* quite redeem the promise of his boyhood. It is not as an essayist, nor as a writer of prose, but as the author of some of the most perfect *vers de société* we possess, that he retains his place in literature.

If we regard Defoe as the predecessor of Steele, we must look upon the eighteenth-century periodical as arising out of the political essay, to which also it drifted back. We may therefore illustrate another phase of the transition by reference to two or three of the few political writers of the period of the Revolution who still deserve consideration as men of letters.

Of these one of the most remarkable was Thomas Paine (1737–1809), who, along with a natural gift of style, had that sincerity which gives vitality to writings much worse than his. "What I write," he says, "is pure nature, and my pen and my soul have ever gone together." The violence of

his politics and the virulence with which he wrote about England naturally enough blinded many contemporaries to his merits. At the distance of more than a century we can regard him dispassionately, and the result of such regard is that he is seen to be no inconsiderable man of letters, and one who, in spite of excesses, embodied in his writings much sound thought.

By birth Paine was English, in his life and work he was mainly American. Like other Americans of his time he became partly French, and some of his pamphlets were written in the French language. He began his literary career in the journals of Philadelphia. Some of his early papers are imitations of the Queen Anne essayists, and it seems probable that, had Paine lived in quiet times and earned his bread as a journalist, he would have ranked among their later followers. For example, we find among his writings *An Occasional Letter on the Female Sex*, whose very title proclaims its affinity to them; and an imaginative paper entitled *Cupid and Hymen*, wherein the former is the champion of marriage for love, while the latter promotes the marriage of convenience, would have caused Steele to welcome him as a contributor. *New Anecdotes of Alexander the Great* is of the class of dreams which figure in *The Spectator*; but Paine's political interests are apparent in the degradation of Alexander, who is seen in the shades under the guise of a horse, and afterwards of a bug which is chopped up by a tom-tit. Horatio thought that to trace the noble dust of Alexander till it was found stopping a bung-hole was to consider too curiously. What would he have said about thus tracing the nobler soul of Alexander? The divinity that of old hedged kings was no longer a very efficient fence on the eve of American independence.

What determined Paine's career was the movement which had that great result. He himself contributed not inconsiderably to it. His pamphlet *Common Sense*, issued in 1776,

had an extraordinary effect. It is forcible, lucid and acute; and, though marred by an absurd straining of theory in obvious contradiction to facts, as in the assertion that in England the will of the king was as much the law of the land as in France, it contains much that is sound and true. At this stage in his career Paine found himself the ally of Burke, whose opposition to the American policy of the English government was, of course, welcome to the party to which Paine belonged. Afterwards, when Burke recoiled from the excesses of the Revolution, Paine's chief work, the *Rights of Man*, was written as a reply to the *Reflections*. The *Rights of Man*, however, and *The Age of Reason*, a kind of theological companion-piece, are not essays but treatises; and Paine's chief claim to rank as an English essayist rests upon the series of papers entitled *The Crisis* which he contributed to *The Pennsylvania Journal* between 1776 and 1783. They are political in purpose, but they are also literary in style. There is no better example of Paine than the opening sentences, the first of which especially became famous; the paper is all the more worthy of note because at a critical juncture it was read by the command of Washington to his soldiers:—

"These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it *now*, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives anything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated."

This has the ring of oratory. The note, though somewhat metallic, is highly effective; and, after all, the clash of metal

was in the air. It was right that the literary note should be in unison. The Marseillaise also is metallic; and here, as in the Marseillaise too, a tone of poetry softens the blare of the trumpet. The fervour of the love of freedom and hatred of tyranny is almost Miltonic. By such gleams of imagination Paine vindicates his position in literature. They are not very frequent, for the subjects with which he dealt were not usually of a kind to encourage them, but they are sufficient to reveal the man. A better illustration of this phase of Paine's mind may be found in the paper addressed to Sir William Howe near the end of *The Crisis* :—

"However men may differ in their ideas of grandeur or of government here, the grave is nevertheless a perfect republic. Death is not the monarch of the dead, but of the dying. The moment he obtains a conquest he loses a subject, and, like the foolish king you serve, will, in the end, war himself out of all his dominions."

The prevalent atmosphere of *The Crisis* is, however, that of logical argument, satire and invective. The invective is powerful, and the satire pungent. Of the numerous "unmaskings" of Junius, more than one has "revealed" Thomas Paine; and if it were merely a matter of power of invective, Paine certainly had it in sufficient degree. It would be easier to match the most biting passages in *Junius* from Paine, than it would be to adduce from *Junius* passages showing the imaginative gift of Paine.

In the same group may be put William Godwin (1756-1836). The author of *Political Justice* belongs to the class of philosophers, and the author of *Caleb Williams* to that of novelists; but Godwin also wrote *The Enquirer* (1797), and for that reason he has a small place among the essayists. But the qualities of Godwin were not such as to make the place a high one. He is far too much of a pedant and a *doctrinaire*, his manner is too dictatorial. He is rather a formal thinker than a wise man;

and formalism gravitates towards the treatise. The errors to which the second-rate theorist is prone are evident in the essays as well as in *Political Justice.* They show themselves in Godwin's doctrine of education: "Punishment would find no place in a truly excellent system of education; even angry looks and words of rebuke would be wholly excluded"—a doctrine which would be sound were there no offending Adam to whip out. They show themselves too in a love of liberty pushed to fanaticism, and beyond fanaticism even to silliness. Godwin thought the condition of a negro slave, "in many respects preferable to that of the youthful son of a free-born European;" and the reason for this sage opinion is that when the negro's labour was done, his master concerned himself no further, whereas "the watchful care of the parent is endless. The youth is never free from the danger of its grating interference." How, it may be asked in wonder, "how did the foolish ever pass for wise" by reason of such solemn perversity as this?

To this class belongs also William Cobbett (1762-1835), a free-lance who in his own day was hardly looked upon as entitled to any place in literature at all, but who is now recognised as the master of a style not unworthy to be named along with that of Swift, on which it is modelled. Cobbett's personal character colours this style. By his abusive pen he made two hemispheres too hot to hold him, though, fortunately for him, the maximum heat was not generated in both simultaneously. English in almost everything, he was Irish in his tendency to be "agin the Government;" and the sharpness of his criticism kept him all through life a *persona ingrata* to those in power. His political writings are extraordinarily virulent. But allowance has to be made; it was the habit of the time; virulence prevailed, as we have seen, even in the calmer sphere of literature; and it may be that Cobbett's clientele would have mistaken moderation for weakness. Not

that he was swayed by any such consideration; violence was natural to him. It has unfortunately spoilt as literature great part of the *Political Register*, and it may be said that it is only in the *Rural Rides*, extracted from the *Register*, that Cobbett still lives, and deserves to live. These are simple, idiomatic and racy to a rare degree. The short sentences, as a rule, contain the plainest statement of fact. But, unadorned as it is, the statement is always effective.

Cobbett's earnestness makes him always respectable, his fervour of heart renders him effective. Indignation makes his prose, as it made Juvenal's verse. He rode abroad in the country, and turned upon it an eye made keen and intelligent by his own peasant upbringing. In spite of much violence and exaggeration and many inconsistencies, there is not a little in his writings that is praiseworthy in substance as well as in style. No one else in his time was so keenly alive to the danger which threatened the country from the disproportionate growth of cities. London was a foul wen; wholesome life demanded the fostering of the rural population, farmers and labourers alike. Whatever told against their interest he denounced, whether it was the action of a landlord who rack-rented his tenants, or of a statesman who imposed a tax that pressed heavily on the rural interest. What would he have said about Cobdenism and the decay of agriculture it has brought about? There was a foundation of reality to nearly all his invective. He is loud in abuse of the "locusts called middlemen;" and however innocent the individual middleman may be, no one will now dispute that the multitude of middlemen and the magnitude of their share in the product of industry are serious evils. He denounced tithes and parsons, too indiscriminately, but not always without reason. There is a telling satiric touch in his railing at pluralities, which he liked as little as he liked absenteeism in the landlord. "A journeyman parson comes," he says, "and

works in three or four churches of a Sunday: but the master parson is not there." He would have delighted (perhaps he did delight) the heart of Ruskin with his scorn of much that the nineteenth century boasted of as progress. Visiting a rotten borough he meets a woman whom he questions as to her travels. The utmost distance she has ever been from home proves to be two and a half miles. "Let no one laugh at her," he goes on, "and, above all others, let not me, who am convinced that the facilities, which now exist of moving human bodies from place to place, are among the curses of the country, the destroyers of industry, of morals, and, of course, of happiness. It is a great error to suppose that people are rendered stupid by remaining always in the same place. This woman was a very acute woman, and as well behaved as need to be."

Cobbett was good-hearted, and the rage and violence which sometimes mar even the *Rural Rides* were generally caused by things in themselves deplorable. He was doubtless speaking the literal truth when he declared that he was ashamed to ride a fat horse, to have a full belly and to wear a clean shirt, while he saw the wretched peasants reeling with weakness and their faces reduced to skin and bone. This goodness of heart robs his egotism and self-satisfaction of offence, though it reveals itself naively enough on innumerable occasions. Thus, he revisits the haunts of his boyhood, describes some of his habits then, and proceeds to contrast himself with his inferiors in a higher rank: "This was the spot where I was receiving my education; and this was the sort of education; and I am perfectly satisfied that if I had not received such an education, or something very much like it; that, if I had been brought up a milksop, with a nurserymaid everlastingly at my heels, I should have been at this day as great a fool, as inefficient a mortal, as any of those frivolous idiots that are turned out from Winchester and Westminster School, or from any of

those dens of dunces called colleges and universities." Cobbett is not quite logical. He ought to have pitied those poor idiots who had received an education so vile that it would have ruined even him; but it is his habit to be indignant with them, and this leads him astray.

It is plain from these extracts that Cobbett's style is in a remarkable degree Saxon in its diction. It is plain also that he does not shrink from words and phrases that savour of slang. Sometimes he revels in them, and yet, by some singular skill, he keeps his slang free from vulgarity. It would not be easy to surpass his outburst about paper money:

"What a false, what a deceptious, what an infamous thing, this paper-money system is! However, it is a pleasure, it is real, it is a great delight, it is boundless joy to me, to contemplate this infernal system in its hour of wreck: swag here: crack there: scroop this way: souse that way: and such a rattling and such a squalling: and the parsons and their wives looking so frightened, beginning, apparently, to think that the day of judgment is at hand!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE EARLY REVIEWERS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: SOME OF THEIR VICTIMS, AND OTHERS

We have seen that before the close of the eighteenth century the periodical essay of the type initiated by Steele gave unequivocal symptoms of decay, and that, though a considerable number of papers continued to be produced, they were feeble and flaccid. The reason was that this kind of literary work no longer attracted the same class of intellect as it attracted in the earlier part of the eighteenth century. Then, all the greater writers, whether of prose or verse, were more or less intimately associated with the periodical essay; Pope and Swift, as well as Addison and Steele, were contributors. But after the close of the eighteenth century it is exceptional to find men of more than the third rank writing to such papers. The reason was not a decline in productive capacity—the great outburst of poetry in the revolutionary period sufficiently disproves that,—but the opening up of other channels of expression. Two in particular require notice. The novel had sprung into being since the time of *The Tatler*, and drew to itself the more imaginative talent which had used the periodical essay as a medium for dreams, allegories, short stories and character sketches. The periodical essay had, therefore, been one of the means to its own undoing; for the De Coverley papers rank among the *incunabula* of the novel. Weakened in this way, the periodical had to find fresh strength elsewhere, or perish. In point of fact it did not die, but was transformed; and the model whereby the change was guided was supplied by *The Gentleman's Magazine*

So great was the popularity of this periodical that, according to Johnson, its proprietor, Cave, used to sell ten thousand copies; while Hawkins declares that, during the period when Johnson was contributing those parliamentary reports in which he took care that "the Whig dogs should not have the best of it," the circulation rose to fifteen thousand. Success so brilliant provoked imitation, and within a few years many magazines arose and perished. *The London Magazine*, however, survived to 1785. A northern imitator, *The Scots Magazine*, begun in 1739, had a still longer career; and as the original won such strong regard from Johnson that "when he first saw St. John's Gate, the place where that deservedly popular miscellany was originally printed, he 'beheld it with reverence,'" so the imitation impressed Boswell with an affectionate regard which still survived when he wrote his great biography.

Johnson contributed many papers to *The Gentleman's Magazine* besides the parliamentary debates, and what Johnson wrote was invariably forcible. Still, it cannot be pretended that his contributions, so far as they are known, are on the same level of importance as *The Rambler* and *The Idler*. Far less did the papers of the other contributors rise to that level. Johnson himself, notwithstanding his "reverence," speaks of some of them in the preface to the volume of the magazine for 1738 with a vigorous frankness that is piquant in such a context. They deserve, he says, "no other fate than to be hissed, torn, and forgotten." Yet, though *The Gentleman's Magazine* was certainly not worthy to be set beside *The Rambler*, *The Rambler* died while *The Gentleman's Magazine* lived on. In a way its very mediocrity was conducive to its longevity. The saying that there is no man who is necessary was true of it. If not Johnson, then some one else would supply parliamentary reports, not perhaps as good as his, not perhaps of the sort to keep the circulation up to

fifteen thousand, but still such as to satisfy many readers. But Steele and Addison *were The Spectator*, and Johnson *was The Rambler*. The design of these papers was such that certain men were indispensable, and if they flagged and grew weary the paper must stop. To this is due no small part of their literary charm. *The Gentleman's Magazine* gets rid of this condition and thereby loses the charm, but becomes almost immortal—becomes at least capable of reaching an indefinite age It may survive indefinite deterioration. By the year 1804 it had become, in the opinion of Southey, the *Oldwomania*. "It does amuse me," he writes, "by its exquisite inanity, and the glorious and intense stupidity of its correspondents; it is, in truth, a disgrace to the age and the country."

It would clearly be absurd to explain the longevity of any periodical merely by its inferiority to others which have not lived so long. Men are not so stupid; they prefer the better; but, in literature as in morals, they may sometimes follow the worse. They do so when the worse is convenient, when it supplies a need which the better does not meet. This *The Gentleman's Magazine* did. The reports of debates in parliament are a case in point. No doubt the earlier political periodicals had partly satisfied the same need. But the basis of *The Gentleman's Magazine* was far broader. The very pseudonym of the editor, Sylvanus Urban, hints as much. [illegible]
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readers are promised an account of the most remarkable events, foreign and domestic; births, marriages, deaths, promotions and bankrupts (*sic*); the price of goods and stocks and bill of mortality. The country is specially catered for in observations on gardening. On the literary side there is to be a register of books; and eighty years later we find the *Magazine* contrasting itself in this matter to its own advantage with "certain anomalous competitors, who, under the novel allurement of appearing only once a quarter, assert their claims to curiosity and attention." The *Magazine*, we are told, exhibits a complete conspectus of the literature of the country, while the periodicals which thus vulgarly bid for popularity by appearing but once a quarter only make selections. Besides the register of books there are to be select pieces of poetry, and—what concerns us here—"essays controversial, humorous, and satirical; religious, moral, and political: collected chiefly from the publick papers." In its early days, therefore, *The Gentleman's Magazine* was, among other things, an eighteenth-century *Review of Reviews*, gathering to its own pages whatever seemed most likely to be interesting from contemporary periodicals. It attempted to be all things to all men. It discussed manners and monsoons, described battles and analysed beauty. It gave legal news, lists of sheriffs and circuits of judges. It advised unmarried ladies, and debated the question of the fall of man. No periodical had ever before attempted to occupy so much ground or to appeal to so many classes. It is the true original both of the modern review and of the modern magazine.

The rise of these is one of the striking features of the early part of the nineteenth century, as their extraordinary multiplication is of its later part and of the present day. They are of special importance in the history of the essay, because, while they have been used for many other purposes, they have been, and are, pre-eminently the medium of the essay; and

their development explains the fact that, during the last century, only the novel has surpassed the essay in bulk of output. So too, just as in the case of the novel, this enormous bulk confronts the critic with a peculiar difficulty. He has to face the task of selection. To include all—even if it were possible—would be to lose the wood among the trees.

Though the story of the foundation of *The Edinburgh Review* has often been told, it cannot be omitted in a volume dealing with the essay; for the famous "blue and yellow" was the first publication of its kind, and long wielded a power which probably no periodical will ever again possess. Its extraordinary success was due, not exclusively to its own merits, but partly also to the mediocrity of such predecessors as it had. Southey's opinion of *The Gentleman's Magazine* has already been quoted; and Scott, when he was helping to found the rival *Quarterly*, ascribed the popularity of *The Edinburgh Review* to the fact that before its appearance the common reviews had become "*extremely mawkish,*" and "*gave a dawdling, maudlin* sort of applause to everything that reached even mediocrity." They were also, he says, too much the organs of particular booksellers, whose wares they lauded indiscriminately.[1]

The birthplace of the new *Review* was Edinburgh, "in the eighth or ninth story or flat in Buccleuch-place, the elevated residence of the then Mr. Jeffrey," says Sydney Smith. There in 1802 met four men, Sydney Smith himself, Francis Jeffrey, Henry Brougham and Francis Horner, and there it was determined to found a review. Smith edited the first number, but afterwards for many years Jeffrey was editor. The *Review* was critical, but critical of much besides literature. In the preface to his works Sydney Smith sketches the state of England at the time when the *Review* started, and the sentences

[1] The further opinion which he expresses, to the effect that Cumberland's proposal that articles should be signed must necessarily be fatal, seems curious at the present day.

are worth quoting as indicating what most influenced the mind of one at least of the founders and most active contributors: "The Catholics were not emancipated—the Corporation and Test Acts were unrepealed—the Game Laws were horribly oppressive—Steel Traps and Spring Guns were set all over the country—Prisoners tried for their Lives could have no Counsel—Lord Eldon and the Court of Chancery pressed heavily upon mankind—Libel was punished by the most cruel and vindictive imprisonments—the principles of Political Economy were little understood—the Law of Debt and of Conspiracy were upon the worst possible footing—the enormous wickedness of the Slave Trade was tolerated—a thousand evils were in existence, which the talents of good and able men have since lessened or removed; and these effects have been not a little assisted by the honest boldness of the *Edinburgh Review*."

This passage gives a sound general idea of the scope of Sydney Smith's (1771-1845) own contributions to the *Review*. He writes on prisons and prisoners, on game laws and spring guns, in a style all the more effective because it is generally moderate. He is not, for example, opposed to all game laws, but only to the injustice of the game laws as they then existed. He is the friend of the helpless and oppressed and the champion of unpopular causes. He is among the earliest advocates of a more liberal system of education for women, and writes with excellent sense on the subject. He condemns the poor laws, holding that they must be abolished, but, again with practical good sense, that they must be abolished very gradually; and the reason why they must be abolished is, "not that they make the rich poor, but that they make the poor poorer." He takes up the cause of the chimney-sweepers, and by a series of quotations shows the horrible nature of the work which the poor boys had to do on whom Lamb's fancy played, humanely indeed, but not with that practical helpfulness which we find in Smith. Yet, while we respect the writer, it must

be admitted that the practical end he usually had in view has made much of his work ephemeral, while Lamb's is a possession for ever. Smith is liberal in reality as well as by profession. The essay entitled *Mad Quakers*, had it come from some other clerical pen, might have been a diatribe against a long-maligned and persecuted sect. Smith's purpose is to praise the generosity and courage, the sense and humanity of the Quakers in their treatment of the insane. He is not prone to bow down in worship of a fetish. His criticism of public schools is still worthy of attention, and the statement of his conviction that that education is the best which mingles a domestic with a school life shows an attitude of mind which was rare in England then as it is rare still.

To suppose that Smith was free from prejudices of his own would be a mistake He pursues the Methodists, for example, with extraordinary malevolence. The liberality of mind with which he views the Quakers and the Roman Catholics seems in the case of Methodism wholly to desert him. Their faults were of a sort to which he could not be tolerant. He is able to quote from their journals passages of extraordinary nonsense; but nothing could justify the language in which he speaks of the sect Much has been written, and with good reason, against the virulence and bad taste of the literary criticism of the time But these faults were by no means confined to the literary critics Neither Jeffrey nor Gifford nor any of the *Blackwood* group ever wrote with worse taste than Sydney Smith against the Methodists:—

"We are a good deal amused, indeed, with the extreme dis relish which Mr. John Styles [who had answered a previous article in the *Review*] exhibits to the humour and pleasantry with which he admits the Methodists to have been attacked, but Mr. John Styles should remember, that it is not the practice with destroyers of vermin to allow the little victims a *veto* upon the weapons used against them. If this were

otherwise, we should have one set of vermin banishing small-tooth combs; another protesting against mouse-traps; a third prohibiting the finger and thumb; a fourth exclaiming against the intolerable infamy of using soap and water."

Smith's wit is his most valuable weapon in controversy and literature. We find it everywhere: the very first sentence of his first contribution to the *Review* is an example. The subject of the essay is Dr. Parr, and Parr's wig is made whimsically to illustrate his method of construction. It is big in front, but "scorns even Episcopal limits behind, and swells out into boundless convexity of frizz, the μεγα θαυμα of barbers, and the terror of the literary world." So too, in the sermon under review, the Doctor subjoins to a discourse of no common length an immeasurable mass of notes on every learned man and thing. Smith's wit has usually, as here, a pungent application to the person dealt with. So it is again in the criticism of a certain Archdeacon (and Canon) Nares, who had preached a sermon condemning farmers for charging high prices for their grain and suggesting that penalties should be levied upon them. After an argument economically faultless, Smith goes on: "The poor are not to be supported, in time of famine, by abatement of price on the part of the farmer, but by the subscription of residentiary canons, archdeacons, and all men rich in public or private property; and to these subscriptions the farmer should contribute according to the amount of his fortune." *Edgeworth on Bulls* naturally gives scope for the witty manner of treatment, and the description of its style is excellent: "The Essay on Bulls is written much with the same mind, and in the same manner, as a schoolboy takes a walk: he moves on for ten yards on the straight road, with surprising perseverance; then sets out after a butterfly, looks for a bird's nest, or jumps backwards and forwards over a ditch."

Smith seldom writes on purely literary subjects, and when

he does review a book he shows no great interest in it from the strictly critical point of view. He has lively articles on Waterton's *Wanderings in South America*, on the *Memoirs of Captain Rock* and on Madame d'Epinay. But his interest is in the substance rather than the manner and literary merits of the book he reviews. With Francis Jeffrey (1773–1850) it was otherwise. He was the literary critic of the group, and among the papers which he contributed to the *Review* from 1802 to 1840, literary subjects greatly preponderate over subjects relating to society and politics, such as those which chiefly interested Sydney Smith. Injustice has been done to Jeffrey through the reaction against the school of criticism to which he belonged. In his views of art he was essentially a man of the eighteenth century, and, unfortunately for him, the taste of the eighteenth century was passing away. But he cannot be judged fairly unless we examine what he can do within the limits of that which he understands. It is not enough to repeat for ever the famous "This will never do," pronounced upon *The Excursion*, or the scarcely less unjust judgment upon *The White Doe of Rylstone*: "This, we think, has the merit of being the very worst poem we ever saw imprinted in a quarto volume." These sentences show that Jeffrey was incapable of appreciating Wordsworth. It would be easy to show further, and it has been shown over and over again, that he was unjust to the whole Lake School, so called. Coleridge and Southey were outside his canon of poetry as well as Wordsworth. This incapacity to appreciate much of the best poetry of the time is unquestionably a serious blot upon Jeffrey's reputation, and it is only a partial excuse to say that he was no worse than most other critics of the time. He *was* worse than some,—for example, Lamb, Hazlitt and Coleridge himself. But it remains still possible that he may have done good work in the criticism of other schools.

If we try to understand Jeffrey's point of view, we shall

soon find that this was the case. Of whatever partook of the eighteenth-century spirit, and so appealed to him personally, he was a generous as well as an acute critic. Campbell did so, and therefore he praises Campbell with a warmth which now appears excessive. For the same reason he over-estimates Rogers. But in both cases, though the modern critic would tone down his eulogies, he would hardly condemn them as inherently unsound. And, except as regards Wordsworth and Coleridge, Jeffrey's strictures upon contemporary poets do not seem now altogether unjust. To his own cost and to his regret he ran athwart of Byron; but the *Hours of Idleness* are not among the works of Byron that we still admire. It is more surprising that he irritated Scott, the least irritable of men of letters, by a criticism of *Marmion* which was at least ungenerous. But the general sketch of his opinions about a number of contemporary poets, which he gives in an article on Campbell's *Specimens of the Poets*, reads not so far amiss, except with regard to the position assigned to Campbell himself: "There—if the future editor have anything like the indulgence and veneration for antiquity of his predecessor—there shall posterity still hang with rapture on the half of Campbell—and the fourth part of Byron—and the sixth of Scott—and the scattered tithes of Crabbe—and the three per cent. of Southey,—while some good-natured critic shall sit in our mouldering chair, and more than half prefer them to those by whom they have been superseded!"

> "Cæsar's pageant, shorn of Brutus' bust,
> Did but of Rome's best friend remind her more,"

and the absence of the names of Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats from this passage, written in 1819, forcibly recalls these poets to us, and brings home more vividly than anything else could do the critical limitations of Jeffrey. He did not understand the romantic revival. To a new poet he too often applied the

test of a bygone criticism, as a chemist drops an acid on the substance before him. If the poet 'reacted' in one way, he was gold, if in another, pinchbeck. Allowance is seldom made for the possible something wholly new in the poet. Yet it would be unjust to press this to the extreme against Jeffrey. To the critics of that time the greatest stone of stumbling and rock of offence was Keats, and so it is worth while to ask how Jeffrey endures the test of his name. Not perfectly, it is true, for he did not think *Hyperion* worth completing; yet not altogether with discredit. Reviewing the *Poems* of 1820 he says that he has been "exceedingly struck with the genius they display, and the spirit of poetry which breathes through all their wild extravagance." And there is surely taste in the judgment he pronounces upon the ode *To Autumn*: "We know nothing at once so truly fresh, genuine, and English—and, at the same time, so full of poetical feeling and Greek elegance and simplicity." How many modern critics could improve upon this? Jeffrey had detected the Greek element before it had become a critical commonplace. Scott expressed the doubt whether Jeffrey had any *feeling* of poetic genius, and Scott was rarely unjust. But the man who wrote thus about Keats was certainly not wholly destitute of such feeling. The just criticism and the skilful choice of extracts in the essay on *Ford's Dramatic Works* support the same conclusion.

As Macaulay said of himself that he was nothing if not historical, so it may be said of Jeffrey that he is nothing if not critical. Yet it must be added that a considerable part of the value of the essays lies in remarks suggested by a vigorous understanding and a wide experience of the world on points not strictly literary. It is this which makes him pronounce Burns's belief "in *the dispensing power* of genius and social feeling, in all matters of morality and common sense" his leading vice. And from the same source came the admirable

remarks on courage in the essay on *Byron's Tragedies*. "Courage," Jeffrey tells us, "is at least as necessary as genius to the success of a work of imagination; since, without this, it is impossible to attain that freedom and self-possession without which no talents can ever have fair play, and, far less, that inward confidence and exaltation of spirit which must accompany all the higher acts of the understanding." He goes on to instance Scott as the supreme example in his time of this form of courage, and adds, "We are confident that no person can read any of his wonderful works, without feeling that their author was utterly careless of the reproach of small imperfections; disdained the inglorious labour of perpetual correctness, and has *consequently*[1] imparted to his productions that spirit and ease and variety, which reminds (*sic*) us of better times, and gives lustre and effect to those rich and resplendent passages to which it left him free to aspire." That *consequently* is worth pages of ordinary criticism, and should be laid to heart by every critic of Scott who is not conscious of being already above the need of it. Critics of Shakespeare need it too, although the vice in their case is rather indiscriminate adulation. Many of those who praise the flaws due to carelessness are utterly blind to the fact that their sole justification is that the "brave translunary things" would have been beyond the reach of a pedantically correct writer.

Among Jeffrey's faults are a somewhat diffuse style, and a tendency to dwell too much on trivialities and details, which swells still more the bulk of the essays. He was a busy man, he always wrote in haste, and it is surprising that, under the circumstances, what he wrote was so good. But posterity makes no allowance for circumstances, and this want of concentration has contributed with the change of taste to depress his reputation almost as much below its proper level as it once stood above it. The famous sentence about *The Excursion*

[1] The italics are Jeffrey's.

shows that he is chargeable also with the vices of undue asperity and of a dictatorial spirit. His mind had an innate pungency, and his practice at the bar tended to increase it. So did his position in the editorial chair. Yet he could be laudatory to excess, as we have already seen in the case of Campbell. We see it too in his extremely warm, if not extravagant, praise of Macaulay and of Dickens. There was, in short, another side to the character of Jeffrey. He was a man essentially amiable and generous, who won the warm affection of friends, literary and legal. Perhaps this aspect is best seen in his relations with Carlyle, whose works were not of a kind to win Jeffrey's whole-hearted approval, and whose 'Germanism' took the editor of the *Review* into very strange company. The section of the *Reminiscences* devoted to Jeffrey is far from being uncritical; but, read with the proper allowances which only those who understand Carlyle can make, it is a fine tribute to a fine character.

"He invented the trade of editorship; before him an editor was a bookseller's drudge, he is now a distinguished functionary." Thus writes Bagehot with his customary insight. And perhaps this is the most memorable fact of all with regard to Jeffrey. In the history of literature it is a service comparable to that done by Johnson when he fought and won the battle against patronage. No doubt it is true that if Jeffrey had not done it some one else must have done it. But just the same may be said of Johnson. In each case the thing *had* to be. Yet the fact remains that the man who did the work was in the one instance Johnson and in the other Jeffrey. If they had never written a word that was worth reading, their names would still be memorable in literature.

The other two who had a share in the creation of *The Edinburgh Review* are no longer popular as men of letters. Francis Horner is now merely *nominis umbra*, and it is difficult to understand the extraordinary tribute which was paid

to his memory in the House of Commons. There is nothing in his scanty literary remains that explains it. The case of Henry Brougham (1779–1868) is different. He was an active and voluminous contributor, writing about eighty articles in the first twenty volumes of the *Review*. But Brougham admirably illustrates the dangers attaching to the rôle of omniscience, and the defects of the Jack-of-all-trades. It was hinted of him that he knew most things better than he knew law; and certainly he knew too much law, too much science, too much of almost everything, to be a good man of letters. He always wrote in haste, and, in consequence, his style, though vigorous, is rough and careless. His great power of sarcasm was not always used in a spirit of justice. The dust of time has settled on his works, and there is no need to disturb it.

One fault which was justly charged against the early *Edinburgh Review* has not yet been mentioned. It was political, which it had every right to be, and it carried politics into literature, and pronounced critical judgment not solely according as books were good or bad, but partly as they were Whig or Tory, which it had no right to do. This was a natural enough consequence of the fact that the founders were all of the Whig party, that the interests of three of them were only in a secondary way literary, and that even Jeffrey had, as the phrase goes, several irons in the fire. The political preoccupations of the Reviewers diminished the value of their criticism because, as Matthew Arnold insisted, the first obligation of criticism is to be disinterested. Unfortunately for English literature, the evil was combated, not by the establishment of a disinterested organ, but by setting up another partisan one. And so for many years nearly all English criticism was vitiated by the importation into it of "regards that stand aloof from the entire point." It would be dangerous to say that even now the evil has been completely eradicated. An ingrained habit of mind is not easily altered, and there are

journals still which are not above suspicion. But one interesting result of the development of periodicals may be noted. The mere multiplication of them has in great measure produced that reform which Matthew Arnold hoped might come from the establishment of a British Academy. When there were only two reviews that mattered, and these concerned themselves with party politics as well as with literature, there was some temptation to view even literature through spectacles of the party colour. If loaves and fishes could be got for the poet, why should not the good Whig reviewer do his best to get them for the good Whig poet? and on the other hand why should not the Tory reviewer give to the "Whig dog" of a poet the treatment of a dog? But when the name of the reviews and magazines is legion, when many of them are of no party colour at all, but will welcome the advocates of both sides, if only they are able enough, why should even a party journal distort the truth by the importation of irrelevant considerations? In those days it was a weighty matter that the author of *The Story of Rimini* was supposed to have libelled the Prince Regent and that the author of *Adonais* was a radical and an atheist. But who stopped before admiring *The Everlasting Mercy* to ask what were the politics or what was the religion of Mr. Masefield?

It had not been originally intended to give *The Edinburgh Review* a partisan character, and for a time the editor and the leading writers would have denied the charge of partisanship. They sought and obtained help from Tories like Scott; but he soon saw reason to believe that he was not treated as he would have been treated had he belonged to their party in politics. It is impossible either to substantiate or to refute Scott's belief: as Gladstone once said of a criticism of Lecky's, the imputation of motives partakes too much of the business of the day of judgment. But Scott was not a suspicious man, and the fact that he entertained suspicion in

this case is itself impressive. Besides, there are so many concurrent circumstances, so many other cases, that it is hardly too dangerous to undertake, for once, the function of the day of judgment. Unfortunately, the way that was taken to right one wrong was, as has been explained, to commit an opposite one. *The Quarterly Review* was started as the organ of Toryism. In the first editor, William Gifford (1756-1826), its founders were far less fortunate than was the rival review in Jeffrey. Gifford was a man who then enjoyed a reputation which has since become puzzling. Even Byron spoke with great respect of the author of *The Baviad* and *The Mæviad*, satires which rouse no enthusiasm in the minds of the few who read them now. Gifford is said to have been personally a good-natured man; but, judged by his writings, he would be pronounced one of the worst tempered in the whole history of literature. Living and dead, friend and foe, all suffer, though in different degrees, from a virulence scarcely to be paralleled. His best work was done in editing the Elizabethan dramatists, and on Jonson he is particularly useful. But though the story of the alarums and battles of Jonson's life was two hundred years old, Gifford took sides and wrote with the violence of a man whose passions were roused and whose interests were threatened. He treated his own contributors with a high-handed discourtesy that seriously damaged the *Review*. Naturally, therefore, opponents and those who differed from him, whether on politics or on points of literary criticism, had little to hope for from his sense of fair play. They were personal enemies. No one ever carried to a greater extreme the vice of criticism on political grounds. No one was ever less sympathetic with new forms of art. Like Jeffrey's, his taste was the taste of the eighteenth century, but he expressed it with less than Jeffrey's wit and with far more than Jeffrey's brusqueness. He seems to be for ever addressing the author criticised in the phrase, Prisoner at the bar; and most

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could hardly fail to illustrate some of the best qualities of his mind.

But Scott's miscellaneous writings are varied as well as voluminous, and some of the best of them are in no way related to his own craft of authorship. Nowhere, perhaps, does he appear as essayist to more advantage than in the papers *On Planting Waste Lands* and *On Landscape Gardening*, —papers written towards the close of his life, after the crash of his fortunes, when he was labouring far beyond his strength. Yet they are singularly easy, fresh, and bright. The reason is that they are the natural outflow of Scott's own mind and taste. As he wrote, many a day spent with Tom Purdie in the woods with which he had surrounded Abbotsford rose in his mind, he regained the zest of happier years, and the joy he felt in writing is transmitted to the reader.

Next in fame to Scott among the contributors to *The Quarterly Review* was Robert Southey (1774-1843), whose indefatigable industry found in the task of the reviewer suitable occupation for those odds and ends of time which were not occupied with tasks more ambitious and, as Southey fondly believed, more likely, or rather more certain, to win immortality for the author. But already Jeffrey's estimate of three per cent. is seen to err on the side of liberality. Southey's epics rest undisturbed on the upper shelf with his histories beside them; only his *Life of Nelson* and a few lyrics are still read. His voluminous works have never been collected, and most of his miscellaneous essays have still to be searched for in the pages of the periodicals to which they were originally contributed. In spite of his remarkable endowments and very great acquirements, this oblivion cannot be said to be unmerited. It is sometimes said that a man can become whatever he determines to be, if he only pursues his end with sufficient persistence; but Southey refutes the assertion. He injured his own reputation by aiming at things which were

interpretation were doubtful there is ample evidence on the point in Lockhart's *Life*. In this respect Campbell, whom he was criticising, was the exact contrary of Scott, and Scott points out with perfect justice, yet without the least suggestion of self-laudation, the evils of over-elaboration and strained revision.

Scott's good-nature produced in his criticism a tendency to praise rather than censure. In his reviews this is naturally not so marked as it was in those personal recommendations which caused Constable to say, with good reason, that he "liked well Scott's *ain bairns*," but dreaded those of his fathering. He could on occasion be severe, as we see in his caustic review of Godwin's absurd story *Fleetwood*. But as a rule the geniality of his tone contrasts very pleasantly with the bitterness and frequent malignity of so much of the criticism of the time. The review—excellent after the clumsy pleasantries at the start—of Maturin's *Fatal Revenge* is typical. It is clear-sighted as to defects, yet generous in the recognition of merits. The same may be said of the essay on Cromek's *Reliques of Burns*. No one was ever better fitted than Scott for the difficult task of commenting on the character of Burns. Calm good sense, clear vision and large charity were all necessary, and he possessed them all in a rare degree. The faults of Burns were not his, yet, while recognising their gravity, he handled them as sympathetically as if they had been his own. The essay is not nearly so brilliant and illuminating as that of Carlyle on Burns, but in some important respects it approaches nearer to polar truth.

The essays on chivalry, romance and the drama, all contributions to the supplement to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, are more careful and complete than those which were dashed off for *The Quarterly Review*. They are still worthy of study. Dealing with subjects which had engaged Scott's attention from his youth and on which he had read very widely, they

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beyond his reach. Great as were his gifts, he over-estimated them. Having no doubt that he was one of the foremost of poets and of historians, he accepted as a payment on account the respectable measure of fame he won from his contemporaries, and drew on posterity for the balance. Posterity has pronounced that the account is already overdrawn. Southey might have done better if he had limited himself to a less extensive field. But he tried everything, not always of his own free choice. The story of his unflagging struggle on behalf of wife and children is most honourable to him, but painful to read. The jaded mind sank beneath its own level. Southey would have written better had circumstances allowed him more leisure; but necessity accentuated an inherent tendency to be too much of a bookworm; for in this respect Southey stood in strong contrast to his friend Wordsworth. The latter read too little, the former read too much. Nearly all that is valuable in Wordsworth comes from the world around him. Southey lived among the same lakes and mountains and had for neighbours the same 'statesmen,' but they had little effect on his writings.

The essays of Southey deal partly with literary and partly with social and political subjects. The latter section illustrates his extraordinary dogmatism and self-confidence. On whatever point he touches he lays down the law with unwavering assurance, although the recollection of his own days of belief in Pantisocracy might have suggested caution and moderation. But in truth Southey was one of the most intellectually arrogant of men, and his dogmatism is the outcome of that arrogance. For some of his views there is more to be said than the Whigs of his day would allow. We are no longer enamoured of the beauty of that manufacturing system which Southey denounced and Macaulay defended. Many now would agree with the view which Macaulay seems to think refuted by the mere statement of it, that the manu-

facturing system was then "a system more tyrannical than that of the feudal ages, a system of actual servitude, a system which destroys the bodies and degrades the minds of those who are engaged in it." Philanthropists from Lord Shaftesbury to Ruskin have been actuated by views much like Southey's, and legislation has been increasingly engaged in devising remedies for the evils which Southey denounced. But if he was sometimes right, it is equally certain that he was often wrong. No one was more frequently the victim of antiquated prejudice. He was reactionary on the Catholic question. He was prepared to defend anything and everything just because it existed. Even sinecures were sacred in his eyes, and the proposal to abolish them seemed to threaten, if not the foundation, at any rate the ornaments of the superstructure of society: "The abolition of sinecures would be, to say the least of it, a measure of doubtful utility." The truth is, Southey had swung from the extreme of revolutionism to the extreme of conservatism.

In his literary essays Southey was generous in praise of unrecognised talent. He was one of those who stretched out a friendly hand to poor John Clare. In relation to contemporaries more popular than himself there is perhaps here and there a trace of soreness not altogether unnatural, but there is always justice in intention. To such a man as Byron Southey was constitutionally incapable of being fair; but his sin in that instance was so fearfully punished that no more need be said about it. In spite of good intentions, however, Southey's criticism has little value. He had few if any principles, he only felt, and consequently he was right or wrong at haphazard.

The value of Southey's essays lies mainly, indeed almost wholly, in their style. They have not sufficient depth of thought, nor have they now sufficient freshness of information to give them vitality for their substance. Neither do they convey that impression of a great personality which Scott's

far more faulty writings give. But they are written in limpid, graceful and easy prose. There are no purple patches, nor is there anything unworthy. No style, not even Goldsmith's, is more free from mannerism.

Other poets besides Southey wrote prose as well as verse, and were not content to be taught their own trade, but presumed to expound its principles. Shelley interested himself in public questions, in Ireland and in the prosecution of Eaton for publishing Paine's *Age of Reason*, as well as in literature. In the minor critical essays some of his opinions are curious enough. He was greatly influenced by personal considerations, ranking *Frankenstein* and *Caleb Williams* among the greatest of books. His only prose essay of real importance is the *Defence of Poetry*, and that belongs to the history of criticism rather than to the history of the essay.

Wordsworth's prose essays are more numerous and more varied, and in the mass more valuable than Shelley's. They are admirably written and extremely interesting—not only the celebrated preface, but the whole body of essays, and letters of the nature of essays, in the collected prose works. They show that, though Wordsworth's method was different from Byron's, he was no more inclined than the fierier poet meekly to kiss the rod of the reviewers. The essay on *Poetry as a Study* contains some vigorous and just comments upon those who have applied themselves to the consideration of the laws of poetry. Among them are both those who are best and those who are worst qualified to judge it:—

"As this Class comprehends the only judgments which are trustworthy, so does it include the most erroneous and perverse. For to be mistaught is worse than to be untaught; and no perverseness equals that which is supported by system, no errors are so difficult to root out as those which the understanding has pledged its credit to uphold. In this Class are contained censors, who, if they be pleased with what is good,

are pleased with it only by imperfect glimpses, and upon false principles; who, should they generalise rightly, to a certain point, are sure to suffer for it in the end; who, if they stumble upon a sound rule, are fettered by misapplying it, or by straining it too far; being incapable of perceiving when it ought to yield to one of higher order. In it are found critics too petulant to be passive to a genuine poet, and too feeble to grapple with him; men, who take upon them to report of the course which *he* holds whom they are utterly unable to accompany—confounded if he turn quick upon the wing, dismayed if he soar stately 'into the region'—men of palsied imagination and indurated hearts; in whose minds all healthy action is languid, who therefore feed as the many direct them, or, with the many, are greedy after vicious provocatives;—judges, whose censure is auspicious, and whose praise is ominous!"

The date of this essay is 1815, and as the *Edinburgh Review* article on *The Excursion* appeared in November 1814, there can be little doubt as to what was in Wordsworth's mind as he wrote, or in which section of the class of students of poetry he would have placed the author of the phrase, "this will never do."

The *Apology for the French Revolution* and the paper on *The Catholic Relief Bill* are of great value as measuring the distance Wordsworth had travelled in the interval between them. The latter is highly conservative. The writer is very much afraid of Rome, and even his trust that "it is the intention of Providence that the Church of Rome should in due time disappear," gives only partial consolation. Clearly he would like to help Providence. The apology is a bold and powerfully-written expression of opinion in favour of the revolution. The poet was not to be frightened even by the execution of a king; and if Burke could wield the weapon of style on one side, Wordsworth had both the power and the will

to do so on the other. It is, however, in the essays on literary and kindred subjects that he is at his best. There are other things besides criticism in them; nor is the excellence of the criticism itself confined to the widely-known *Preface*. The three essays *Upon Epitaphs* are all admirable. That which was contributed to *The Friend* in 1810 is so full of just and weighty reflection as to deserve the praise Lamb bestowed upon it: "Your Essay on Epitaphs is the only sensible thing which has been written on that subject, and it goes to the bottom." The discussion *Of Literary Biography* is also excellent. No one has written more powerfully than Wordsworth against unsparing revelation. The paper (which is in the form of a letter) was evoked by the strictures in Currie's *Life of Burns;* and the living poet, who had so little of Burns's weakness to plead guilty to, generously defends the dead one. The biographer *cannot*, he insists, have known enough to justify him in his revelations. This essay is a criticism of life rather than a criticism of literature; but it contains admirable criticism of the latter sort too, and shows a catholic taste and an open-minded tolerance in Wordsworth which may come as a surprise to some readers:—

"The poet, treating of primary instincts, luxuriates among the felicities of love and wine, and is enraptured while he describes the fairer aspects of war: nor does he shrink from the company of the passion of love though immoderate—from convivial pleasure though intemperate—nor from the presence of war though savage, and recognised as the handmaid of desolation. Frequently and admirably has Burns given way to these impulses of nature; both with reference to himself and in describing the condition of others." Frequently and admirably! Perhaps Wordsworth's "standard of intoxication" was not so "miserably low" after all; at any rate he was not incapable of appreciating "Willie brew'd a peck o' maut."

The close association of the name of Wordsworth with that of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) makes the transition to the latter natural and easy. Coleridge too was a victim of the Reviewers as truly as Wordsworth or as Keats; and Coleridge as well as Wordsworth, by reason of *The Watchman*, *The Friend*, and the collection of aphorisms which he called *Aids to Reflection*, demands consideration as an essayist. Coleridge was unquestionably one of the most highly-gifted of Englishmen, and no part of the work of such a mind can be without value. Yet it must be admitted that Coleridge as essayist is in the main singularly disappointing. There is abundant evidence that he exercised a wonderfully quickening influence on the most thoughtful spirits of the generation immediately following his own, and none of his prose works probably contributed so much to that influence as the *Aids to Reflection*. Not seldom, it would seem, students found there the key to the author's poetry, which had previously seemed to them weird and incomprehensible. It is otherwise now. The four or five great poems have become part of our spiritual inheritance, but the tortuous phraseology and the technicalities of philosophy repel most readers from the *Aids to Reflection*. Certainly that book cannot be placed on an equality with the works of the aphoristic writers of the seventeenth century.

The greater part of *The Friend* too is addressed to philosophers, and it likewise is spoilt by the vicious involution of Coleridge's prose style, and the discursiveness which combines with that involution to baffle the reader in his search for the central meaning. *The Friend* proposes to afford "help to the struggling, counsel to the doubtful, light to the blind, hope to the despondent, refreshment to the weary;" but it is to be feared that these, and especially the blind and the weary, have gone away disappointed. There are many references to a "system," but the system is very elusive. Though we

find glimmerings of principles, ethical, political and æsthetic, to reduce them to a coherent system would be almost to re-write *The Friend.* There are pregnant suggestions here and there on a great variety of subjects—the value of great men, the liberty of the press, religious toleration, the errors of the party system, and a hundred other things. The parts which come most strictly within the province of the essay are the various *Landing-Places*, or groups of "essays interspersed for amusement, retrospect and preparation." These are enriched with suggestive comparisons and contrasts, stories and biographical papers. They are brightened by occasional striking remarks. At one point we come upon Coleridge's well-known reply to the lady who asked him whether he believed in ghosts: "No, madam, I have seen far too many myself." At another we find his anticipation of Carlyle's retort to the saying that no man is a hero to his valet. It is Nelson's friend and captain, Sir Alexander Ball, whom Coleridge deems fit to stand the test, and it is of Ball that he tells a story admirably illustrative of the power of law. The passage is so free from the vices of Coleridge's prose style and so nobly eloquent that it deserves to be rescued from a context where in the present day few probably will go to find it. Ball had been appointed captain of a man-of-war with a mutinous crew, and had restored order, not by exceptional severity, but by the promulgation of rules as to offences and their punishment as near as possible to those of the ordinary law, and with precautions against hasty or arbitrary action:—

"Strength may be met with strength; the power of inflicting pain may be baffled by the pride of endurance; the eye of rage may be answered with the stare of defiance, or the downcast look of dark and determined resolve; and with all this there is an outward and determined object to which the mind can attach its passions and purposes, and bury its own disquietudes in the full occupation of the senses. But who

dares struggle with an invisible combatant? with an enemy which exists and makes us know its existence—but where it is, we ask in vain. No space contains it; time promises no control over it; it has no ear for threats; it has no substance that my hands can grasp, or my weapons find vulnerable; it commands and cannot be commanded; it acts and is insusceptible of my reaction; the more I strive to subdue it, and the more I think of it, the more do I find it to possess a reality out of myself, and not to be a phantom of my own imagination; that all, but the most abandoned men, acknowledge its authority, and that the whole strength and majesty of my country are pledged to support it; and yet that for me its power is the same with that of my own permanent self, and that all the choice which is permitted to me consists in having it for my guardian Angel, or my avenging Fiend! This is the spirit of law! the lute of Amphion! the harp of Orpheus! This is the true necessity, which compels man into the social state, now and always, by a still-beginning, never-ceasing force of moral cohesion."

Hartley Coleridge (1796–1849), though otherwise much inferior to his father, had as an essayist a far lighter touch. His pleasantly-written *Biographia Borealis* stand in point of length midway between short biographies and biographical essays. The sketches of Marvell and Congreve give scope to the taste and critical faculty of their author, and all are characterised by a genial and attractive humanity. But it is in the miscellaneous papers that the essayist is best revealed. Like Hartley Coleridge's poetry—and, for that matter, like his father's too,—they are exceedingly tantalising; there is so much promise and so little performance—just a handful of pieces in all, yet in these conclusive evidence of the capacity to have produced many essays of all but the highest quality had he been granted only one gift more. The missing gift was unfortunately that indispensable "stalk of carl hemp

in man," the lack of which leaves the whole character flaccid. This handful of essays ranges from gay to grave, but the "sun-faced little man" inclines to lightness. *Books and Bantlings* and *Brief thoughts upon Brevity* are pleasant enough fooling. He can also hide real thought under the appearance of a light treatment, as in *Atrabilious Reflections upon Melancholy*; or he can be wholly grave, as in *Antiquity*, an excellent essay, fertile in illustration and rich with literary allusions. The distinction drawn in *Shakespeare a Tory and a Gentleman* between "God Almighty's Gentleman" and the "very respectable Gentleman" is admirable. The former "may do just as he pleases, subject to no restrictions but those of honour, virtue, and religion." But "your very respectable *gentlemanly* man succeeds very well so long as he is quite correct and well with the world—so long as he preserves his gravity, keeps perfectly sober, out of love, and out of debt. But a sudden spring of laughter, a drappie in his e'e, a touch in the heart or on the shoulder, dissolves the illusion at once, and leaves him worse than nothing—for he is too like a Gentleman to appear well in any other capacity."

Linked with the elder Coleridge by the fact that they were his followers, and that they, too, had a philosophical aim, in their case unencumbered by any pretence to system, were the brothers Hare—Augustus William (1792–1834) and Julius (1795–1855)—whose *Guesses at Truth*, first published in 1827 and afterwards enlarged, at one time powerfully influenced the minds of the more thoughtful young men. A curious little link with the younger Coleridge too may be noticed in passing. Just as he has happily discriminated between the true gentleman and the respectable imitation, so, in another way, have the authors of *Guesses at Truth*. "A Christian," they say, "is God Almighty's gentleman; a gentleman, in the vulgar, superficial way of understanding the word, is the Devil's Christian."

The two brothers were men of no mean endowment, and *Guesses at Truth* is a work of solid merit, containing some valuable essays on most diverse subjects—laughter, artificiality, independence and freedom, the influence of the sea on nations dwelling near it, transportation for crime, etc. There are many wise remarks on language and the choice of words. But the writers adopt the aphoristic method, which demands the very highest endowment; and they are not quite great enough to follow in the steps of Bacon and Jonson. The following passage from an essay on the influence of surnames gives a fair conception of their spirit and manner: "The true spirit of an aristocracy is not personal, but corporate. *He who is animated by that spirit would rather be a branch* of a great tree than a sucker from it. The demagogue's aim and triumph is to be lifted on the shoulders of the mob: when thus borne aloft, he exults, however unsteady his seat, however rapidly he may be sure to fall. But the aristocrat is content to abide within the body of his order, and to derive his honour and influence from his order, more than from himself. The glory of his ancestors is his. Another symptom of the all-engulphing whirl with which the feeling of personality has been swallowing up everything else for the last century, is the stale, flat ridicule lavisht by every witling and dullard on those who take pride in an illustrious ancestry. We had become unable to understand any honour but that which was personal, any merit or claim but personal. We had dwindled and shrunk into a host of bare *Ies*."

CHAPTER IX

THE EARLY MAGAZINES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

For many years the two great quarterlies stood alone, and while periodicals of many sorts rose around them there was none that sought to invade their territory. To a certain extent, it is true, Leigh Hunt's publications, which have already been noticed, did so; as also, still more notably, did *Blackwood's Magazine* (1817). The younger Tories were by no means fully contented with *The Quarterly Review* as Gifford had made it. They felt that it lacked some of the qualities which rendered its rival so effective an instrument of the Whig party. To some extent the difference was due to age. Jeffrey and Sydney Smith were, the one just under and the other just over thirty when their review was started; and their principal coadjutors were still younger. Gifford, on the other hand, was over fifty when he became editor of the *Quarterly*. Partly also it was a matter of endowment. Sydney Smith had no rival for wit, and the intellect of Jeffrey was altogether more nimble than that of the Tory editor. The more eager and fiery spirits therefore felt that the representative periodical of their party lacked the necessary verve and brilliancy, and they conceived the idea of making good the defect. As Edinburgh had delivered the first thrust, so it was left for Edinburgh to find the parry. It was the home at the time of two of the most recklessly brilliant of the younger men of letters, Wilson and Lockhart, and of two of the most daring publishers, Constable and Blackwood. The latter had just started a monthly magazine under the editorship of two local personages, Pringle and Cleghorn. Their failure gave an

opening to John Wilson (1785–1854) and John Gibson Lockhart (1794–1854), and the result of this union of publisher-editor and critics was the celebrated *Blackwood's Magazine.* The commotion it caused is as well known as the story of the foundation of *The Edinburgh Review.* Locally at least this commotion was mainly due to *The Chaldee Manuscript*, an extremely amusing and in the main good-natured, but utterly reckless, skit directed against a number of the best-known men in Edinburgh, from Scott downwards. This article made the fortune yet threatened the existence of the magazine. So great was the outcry that *The Chaldee Manuscript* was not reprinted in the subsequent issue of the first number, which was due to the keen local interest aroused by it. Other early articles inherently more objectionable roused little comment, because the victims were distant and were less able to enforce respect for their just complaints. Such were the articles on Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* and on *The Cockney School, i.e.*, practically Leigh Hunt. Unfortunately the new magazine, whose *raison d'être*, in part, was to protest against the partisanship and unfairness of the criticism in *The Edinburgh Review*, was itself following the worst form of a bad tradition. The blame must be shared by all concerned, but it seems only fair that the least weighty share should rest on the shoulders that bore the most, at least until the publication of Lang's *Life of Lockhart.* Surely Lockhart, the youth of twenty-three, was less blameworthy than Wilson, the man of thirty-two. But further, only those who have read much of the periodical literature of that time can fairly award the censure. There is at least some truth in the view that morality varies with generations of time and degrees of latitude; and in this matter of the ethics of criticism, what would be intolerable now was the almost universal custom then. Not only the *Blackwood* and the *Edinburgh* men wrote thus, but Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt and Coleridge himself as well. It is doubtful if

any man of the time was wholly free from blame, unless it was Lamb, who never intervened in controversy except with his admirably dignified *Letter to Robert Southey*. And thus it comes that the same writer may exhibit the most inconsistent qualities according as his passions and prejudices are or are not engaged. Hence the puzzling diversity of the judgments pronounced upon those men. Thus, in *William Blackwood and his Sons*, Mrs. Oliphant, who may be regarded as a sort of official defender of the *Magazine*, pronounces the victim of *The Cockney School* "as evil-tongued a critic as could be found;" while the writer of his life in *The Dictionary of National Biography* declares that he was as an appreciative critic hardly equalled, and that "his guidance is as safe as it is genial." And both judgments are essentially just, though the latter is perhaps over-emphatic.

As essayists the two *Blackwood* men are disappointing. Wilson indeed wrote nothing that is not disappointing. Yet Carlyle declared that he seemed to him "by far the most *gifted* of all our literary men either then or still." He added, however, that this most gifted of literary men "has written nothing that can endure," and he gave the reason—"the central tie-beam seemed always wanting." That is the precise truth about Wilson. He had fervid imagination, an irresistible flow of spirit, abundant intellect, but no backbone of intellectual principle. To the day of his death he was a boy of genius. Hence he is far better when condensed in *The Comedy of the Noctes Ambrosianæ* than in his own full and overflowing abundance. At times he is swept on by the rush of his feelings; and then he would be admirable, could he retain just a modicum of self-control. But the very thing which makes him good also makes him ineffective. We see this, for example, in his essay on *The Genius and Character of Burns*. It sweeps the reader on with its fervour, and yet wearies him. Contrast it with Carlyle's magnificent essay,

where we have the fervour combined with the sense of restraint. Probably we must explain in the same way the extraordinary irresponsibility of Wilson's criticisms. He was one of the earliest admirers of Wordsworth and the other Lake poets. He knew the men and had lived among them. In his collected works there are passages of praise not unworthy even of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Yet the first number of *Black-* [illegible] called *The Excursion* "the worst poem of any character in the English language."

To see Wilson at his best it is necessary to turn aside from the criticism and consider rather the more imaginative among the *Essays Critical and Imaginative* and in *The Recreations of Christopher North*. Wherever he gives rein to his own tastes and portrays his own temperament, he imparts to his writings some, though only a small portion, of those high gifts which so impressed Carlyle. They show "his rich abundance of quick, generous, and expansive feeling," which Lockhart in *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk* picks out as the characteristic of his eloquence. *Anglimania* is breezy and fresh, *Inch-Crum* and *The Moors* show genuine love of nature as well as of sport, and *Cottages* is full of evidence of the interest the adventurous sportsman took in his own kind, and not least in those of the humbler ranks. But even these are second rate. The style is copious, as the writer's body was large; vivid, as his eye was bright; careless, like his dress. But it is altogether too florid and exclamatory. A little of it suffices. Wilson is not one of the authors to whom the reader readily goes back.

Lockhart, unlike Wilson, has left works which are a permanent possession of literature. If he is surpassed as a biographer, it is only by Boswell: his *Life of Burns* is very

good, and his *Life of Scott* is great. Yet in his essays he is, except for two or three, even more disappointing than Wilson. He does not possess Wilson's extraordinary verve. In youth at least he was, like Wilson, guilty of critical sins of extreme gravity. After he became editor of *The Quarterly Review* the surprising thing about many of his papers is that they are dull. There are exceptions: the article on Tennyson's *Poems* of 1833 is irresistibly laughable; and if there is critical blindness in it, there is also critical acuteness. In writing it he seems to have been, as it were, blind of one eye. But the impression given by his essays as a whole is one of dulness. Lang states as the reason that Lockhart had deliberately adopted the theory that the reviewer's function was to make the reader acquainted with the general purport of the book criticised. He therefore describes and summarises, instead of using the book after the fashion of Macaulay, as a peg on which to hang his own essay. There is evidence that Lockhart had formed this theory at the very outset of his career. It is embodied in one of the best of his essays, the *Remarks on the Periodical Criticism of England*. In that article the imaginary Baron von Lauerwinkel contrasts the German system with the English—the humdrum but painstaking and conscientious man of books who there gives his account, instructive though it may be dull, of the book he is reviewing, with the English editor, brilliant, smart, often flippant, who thinks of himself first and the book afterwards. He proceeds to give a very able though severe criticism of the critics, Gifford and "Jeffray," as the great Edinburgh Reviewer is called throughout.

Lang's palliation of Lockhart's early criticisms, guarded as it is, is not wholly successful. He clears him of the guilt of the attacks upon Coleridge and Wordsworth, he condemns Wilson for his gross inconsistency, and he praises Lockhart for his admiration of Wordsworth and Coleridge. But unfortunately he would not have been able to deny, had the

question been pressed against him, that in a minor degree Lockhart too is strangely inconsistent. Thus, in condemning the *Blackwood* attack on the *Biographia Literaria* he speaks in the warmest terms of Coleridge. "If," he says, "there be any man of grand and original genius alive at this moment in Europe, such a man is Mr. Coleridge." Yet in *The Cockney School* he had spoken of Coleridge as "a greater Quack still" than Hunt, the vilest, apparently, of all "that pestiferous crew." We can only once more note and wonder.

Disappointment with Lockhart's essays is all the keener, because it is evident that he had in a high degree the requisite gifts. No reader of the *Life of Scott* needs to be told that the biographer was master of a style far more pure and effective though less showy than that of Wilson. The scene of Scott's death is a masterpiece. Further, *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk* makes it evident that he had the gifts of humour and keen observation and description, which are among the most valuable of the qualities of the essayist. Both with pencil and with pen Lockhart had a rare knack of hitting off a likeness. His caricature sketches, especially those of the Scotch minister and the Scotch judge, are admirable; but not more admirable than the contrast between the Scottish peasant and the Gloucestershire farmer in *Peter's Letters*: "A Scotch peasant with his long dry visage, his sharp prominent cheek-bones, his grey twinkling eyes, and peaked chin, would seem a very Argus, if set up close against the sleek and ponderous chubbiness of a Gloucestershire farmer."

But though among the earlier periodicals it was the two great reviews that were the most influential, and *Blackwood* that made the greatest noise, there was a fourth periodical, comparatively obscure and short-lived, *The London Magazine* (1820-1829), which, during the period of its existence, made the largest contribution of permanent value to literature. The tragic connexion between it and *Blackwood* is well known.

Lockhart went to London in order to fight a duel with its editor, John Scott; who, however, evaded the meeting in what Lockhart thought a cowardly manner. Soon afterwards Scott fell by the hand of Lockhart's friend, Christie, though the latter was so anxious to prevent disaster that he fired his first shot in the air.

The ill-starred Scott was a man who had the genius to attract genius, and the tact to discern that particular type of endowment which was suited for his purpose. Men as highly gifted have served upon the staff of other periodicals than his, but it may be questioned whether any English magazine has ever had the help of so many who possessed in an eminent degree that gift for essays which is so peculiarly serviceable to a periodical. Early in its career *The London Magazine* numbered among its contributors Charles Lamb, a host in himself, Hazlitt and De Quincey; while among the lesser lights were the poet Darley, Reynolds, the friend of Keats and of Hood, and Wainewright, afterwards notorious as a murderer. Even such a band as this was noticeably strengthened by the accession, a little later, of Mary Russell Mitford.

Scott's death was a serious but not a fatal blow to the *Magazine*. He had already gathered his group of writers together, and they continued after his death to serve the periodical he had made. Though, however, it flourished for a while, even the very high literary merit of its contents was not enough to preserve it permanently. It would seem that at that time no periodical could long survive in England unless it linked itself with a political party. Now *The London Magazine* was not indifferent to politics, but it appealed only to a small band of the most advanced Liberals. This was in the literary sense its salvation. As the faithful were few, it was necessary to go *in partes infidelium* for material; and as Whig and Tory were alike outside the pale, to be just to

the literary productions of both was comparatively easy. But both Whig and Tory read for the sake of politics more than for the sake of literature; and so *The London Magazine* failed to retain permanently the indispensable support, and died in 1829.

The greatest glory of *The London Magazine* is that it found a place for the prince of English essayists, Charles Lamb (1775–1834). There are essayists, like Bacon, of more massive greatness, and others, like Sir Thomas Browne, who can attain loftier heights of eloquence; but there is no other who has in an equal degree the power to charm. If an attempt be made to discover the secret of this power, it will be found that first and chief among the factors contributory to it is the incomparable sweetness of disposition which Lamb not only possessed but had a unique gift of communicating to his writings. Facts in Lamb's life too well known to need repetition, prove how deep was the goodness of which this charm was the flower. They justify the emphatic praise of Wordsworth:—

> "Oh, he was good, if e'er a good man lived."

But, though it is needless to recount the facts, it may not be amiss to note briefly the evidence his writings present of the depth of their influence on his life and of the greatness of the sacrifice he was called upon to make, and made without a a murmur. It is a pathetic fact, as Ainger has pointed out, that from the moment when the terrible catastrophe of 1796 could be buried, as it were, from sight, though it could never be forgotten, the name of Lamb's mother never occurs in his writings. He who is so communicative, though with whimsical elements of fiction, about himself, his relations and his friends, is as silent as the grave about the nearest relation of all. We have pictures of every one of his intimates and connexions, but of his mother not even a passing mention. The

blow had fallen too full on the heart, and for his own sake, as well as for the sake of the hapless sister who did the deed, Lamb closed his lips tight upon the tragedy and upon everything that could call it back to mind. Again, Lamb lived the life of a celibate; yet there is no writer whose works bear more deeply the impress of a character sensitive to and capable of the fireside happiness of wife and children. It is not merely the exquisite reverie *Dream Children*, though that alone would be enough. The evidence is scattered everywhere. Not only are there numerous references elsewhere to Alice W——n, as he chose to call that Ann Simmons whose children called Bartrum father, but there is a flavour, an aroma, in essays where she is not named, as, for example, in every word he wrote about the daughters of Captain Jackson. Why did such a man remain single? He is known to have made one proposal of marriage in the course of his life, apparently with the consent and approval of Mary Lamb. The danger of the taint in the blood, though it was not unknown then, was less clearly understood than it is now. But the obligation to his sister was never absent from Lamb's mind. It seems probable that after his boyish love of Ann Simmons, for her sake he put aside all other thoughts of marriage except that which led to the proposal to Miss Kelly. Yet no taint of gall passed into the nature so severely tried. In an age when the bitterness of the heart was allowed too often to distil from the pen, Lamb alone was never either wrong-headed or wrong-hearted. His only rival for almost perfect goodness of nature is Scott.

Much has been written, and with good reason, about the humour of Lamb, his power of infinite jest, his exquisite sense of style. It may be well to begin, for once, by insisting upon his wisdom as the greatest of all his qualities; for the sense of it has been dulled, partly by his own habit of hiding it by a jest, and partly by a misconception by contemporaries cognate

to, though less gross than, that from which Goldsmith had suffered before. Though Hazlitt in *Table Talk* calls him the most sensible as well as the wittiest of men, there is sometimes a trace of condescension in the references of Lamb's friends to him. He himself justly complained of Coleridge for the mawkish phrase "gentle-hearted Charles," and said roundly that he would rather be called "drunken dog." The phrase was no mere accident. It was the outcome of a habit of mind; and the friends of Lamb never wholly conquered the habit; to Wordsworth also it was "Lamb the frolic and the gentle" who in 1834 "vanished from his lonely hearth." Lamb's friends loved him and admired him; and yet they had more than a suspicion that in the weightier matters they were his superiors. They were not. Lamb was, among other things, one of the wisest men of his time.

The evidences of this wisdom are to be met with everywhere. It is the essence of Lamb's criticism. No one but a man endowed with the very genius of common sense could have been so uniformly right as he. Taste alone will not do, for taste is apt to have a bias—Lamb's certainly had for the quaint and the antique. But good sense makes him substantially right even where his own preferences do not guide him; and where they do guide him he has, at his best, as in the essay *On the Genius and Character of Hogarth*, a marvellous power of comprehension and interpretation which can be explained only as the fruit of a rare wisdom. Again, *The Old and the New Schoolmaster* is the work of a man who has looked upon life with the shrewdest and most penetrating eye There is a sound philosophy of life in *Old China*, and excellent principles of education are laid down in *Recollections of Christ's Hospital.* The author of *Modern Gallantry* had delved beneath shows to reality; and *The Tombs in the Abbey* is as just in thought as it is vigorous in style. *Grace before Meat* is from beginning to end instinct with wisdom. It also illus-

trates well the reason why this quality in Lamb has so often passed undetected. There is a playfulness in it that turns the mind from the expectation of serious thought. But the serious thought is there. He flings down a profound truth in a phrase—" true thankfulness (which is temperance)." And in this lies his whole philosophy of the grace, beautiful at a poor man's table, less beautiful at a rich man's, and not beautiful at all at a city banquet. " When I see a citizen in bib and tucker, I cannot imagine it a surplice." " You are startled at the injustice of returning thanks—for what?—for having too much while so many starve?" " The proper object of the grace is sustenance, not delicacies; the means of life, and not the means of pampering the carcass." It is unanswerable; the profoundest thinker could have taught no more. Take again the essay on *A Quakers' Meeting*—the Quakers, by the way, are pronounced to have more right to a grace than their neighbours, because " they are neither gluttons nor wine-bibbers as a people." Though Lamb includes the Quaker with the Caledonian, the Jew and the Negro among his " imperfect sympathies," the Quaker essay is a model of comprehension, and sympathetic comprehension too. There is no better test of wisdom. To be able to comprehend and do justice to that which is widely different from ourselves is one of the things most difficult of achievement. Lamb's own words in *Imperfect Sympathies* show how great for him the achievement was, how impossible to any but a mind most richly endowed with good sense, an eye most penetrating to detect reality:—

" I love Quaker ways, and Quaker worship. I venerate the Quaker principles. It does me good for the rest of the day when I meet any of their people in my path. When I am ruffled or disturbed by any occurrence, the sight, or quiet voice of a Quaker, acts upon me as a ventilator, lightening the air, and taking off a load from the bosom. But I cannot

like the Quakers (as Desdemona would say) 'to live with them.' I am all over sophisticated—with humours, fancies, craving hourly sympathy. I must have books, pictures, theatres, chit-chat, scandal, jokes, ambiguities, and a thousand whim-whams, which their simpler taste can do without. I should starve at their primitive banquet. My appetites are too high for the salads which (according to Evelyn) Eve dressed for the angel, my gusto too excited

To sit a guest with Daniel at his pulse."

Comprehension of that which is different from self is one test of Wisdom; self-knowledge is another—the last and highest, according to the Delphic motto as it is commonly interpreted. No one stands the test better than Lamb. There is evidence of that knowledge of self in the quotation just given. Much the same view of himself is given again in *Mackery End:* "Out-of-the-way humours and opinions—heads with some diverting twist in them—the oddities of authorship please me most." But the best evidence is to be found in the fine *Character of the late Elia*, in which Lamb, under the guise of "a friend of the late Elia," stands aloof and criticises himself with far subtler comprehension than any contemporary ever showed. He, and he alone, knew exactly the significance of his own jests and apparent irrelevancies. He writes about Elia's conversation, but the words are applicable no less to his writings: "He would interrupt the gravest discussion with some light jest; and yet, perhaps not quite irrelevant in ears that could understand it. . . . He would stutter out some senseless pun (not altogether senseless, perhaps, if rightly taken) which has stamped his character for the evening." Such was Lamb's way of hinting that there was method in his madness. But even his friends could not fully and at all times believe it.) And how delicately in the same preface (as became a friend writing of the dead) he hints at the infirmity

which he exaggerates in the *Confessions of a Drunkard*: "He was temperate in his meals and diversions, but always kept a little on this side of abstemiousness."

A man may, however, be most sagacious and yet fail to win love, as Lamb won and still retains it. The secret of that is the nobility of nature which the facts of Lamb's life so eloquently attest, the gentleness of heart which Coleridge praised, not in error, but in the wrong way, the goodness to which Wordsworth bore his emphatic testimony. This too is graven deep upon the essays. They are full of phrases that reveal it. What but the kindliest of hearts could have thought as Lamb did about a kindly face? "When a kindly face greets us, though but passing by, and never knows us again, nor we it, we should feel it an obligation." In his thoughts on his own childhood we see the genesis of this spirit of his manhood: "The solitude of childhood is not so much the mother of thought, as it is the feeder of love, and silence, and admiration." There are whole essays irradiated with it—the two just quoted, *Grace before Meat*, *The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers*, *Captain Jackson*. There is an unaffected gusto in the story of Jem White in the *Chimney-Sweepers*. The economic wisdom of *A Complaint of the Decay of Beggars* may be dubious: we know that Burn, the author of the history of the Poor-Law, would even have made it penal to give to beggars. But there can be no doubt of the charity of the heart that wrote: "Shut not thy purse-strings always against painted distress. Act a charity sometimes." But perhaps the most impressive of all proofs of the boundless kindliness of Lamb is to be found in *Captain Jackson*. If the character were read a little differently, what a subject for *The Book of Snobs!* Notwithstanding his reputation for cynicism, Thackeray was no unkindly man; but he could never have looked upon a Captain Jackson with the large-hearted charity of Lamb. Genteel poverty is treated in

The Book of Snobs too; but what we see there is the pretentious host lifting the pretentious cover from the dish where lie two or three lean chops. In Lamb, imagination conquers reality, the remnant rind of cheese becomes a generous meal, "the sensation of wine was there," though no wine, and "you reeled under the potency of his unperforming Bacchanalian encouragements." "You saw with your bodily eyes indeed what seemed a bare scrag—cold savings from the foregone meal—remnant hardly sufficient to send a mendicant from the door contented. But in the copious will—the revelling imagination of your host—the 'mind, the mind, Master Shallow,' whole beeves were spread before you—hecatombs—no end appeared to the profusion." Or again, is not the very soul of goodness in that passage in *Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading* where Lamb praises the Circulating Library copy of a novel?—

"How beautiful to a genuine lover of reading are the sullied leaves, and worn-out appearance, nay, the very odour (beyond Russia), if we would not forget kind feelings in fastidiousness, of an old 'Circulating Library' Tom Jones, or Vicar of Wakefield! How they speak of the thousand thumbs, that have turned over their pages with delight!—of the lone sempstress, whom they may have cheered (milliner, or harder-working mantua-maker) after her long day's needle-toil, running far into midnight, when she has snatched an hour, ill-spared from sleep, to steep her cares, as in some Lethean cup, in spelling out their enchanting contents! Who would have them a whit less soiled? What better condition could we desire to see them in?"

There is nothing affected or insincere about this. In his own way Lamb was a champion of the poor as well as Dickens, and one hardly less catholic in his sympathies or less tolerant. The story of the beggar who left a legacy of five hundred pounds to the bank clerk who had given him alms for twenty

years had no power to dry up Lamb's charity: on the contrary, he saw in it "rather a beautiful moral of well-directed charity on the one part, and noble gratitude on the other." Had he lived to see London reproduced in all its complexity in *Pickwick* and its successors, what would he have thought? He was a son of the great city, and for him too Nature was to be found in Fleet Street rather than in the Lakes.

A character such as this, freely self-revealed, could not fail to be among the most attractive things in literature. And Lamb is constantly autobiographical. Not that it is safe to take his statements without examination as literal facts. He had a turn for mystifications, he delighted in weaving threads of fiction in a web of truth. But rarely if ever do the fictions seriously interfere with the genuineness of his confidences. It matters nothing that the real name of Mrs. Battle was Burney, and that of Alice W——n Simmons, or that the Cousin Bridget was really a sister, or that when he says, "Brother or sister, I never had any to know them," his statement will not square with facts. Such deviations from precise truth, the disguises, usually transparent, which he chose to assume, do not alter the essential fact that throughout, to a degree almost unexampled in English, Lamb is personal and autobiographical. He is so not only in the essays just referred to, but in what he wrote about Christ's Hospital, in *The Superannuated Man*, in *Oxford in the Vacation*. But to be exhaustive would be almost to make a catalogue. Everywhere he takes the reader into his confidence. He is personal in his criticism almost as much as elsewhere. The *Detached Thoughts* are admirable criticism; but they are Lamb's, and they could not possibly belong to any one else. The same may be said of the famous essay on the artificial comedy of the eighteenth century. From childhood to old age he gives the reader the means of tracing him. *Mackery End* and *Blakesmoor* give the reminiscences of early childhood, *Recollections of Christ's Hospital*

and *Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago* carry on the tale to the years of school. *The South-Sea House* is based upon personal recollections following that period, and *The Superannuated Man* tells how "at just ten minutes after eight," at the close of a long connexion with the East India Company, he "went home—for ever." *Newspapers Thirty-five Years Ago* records the beginnings of literary experience—the toilsome manufacture, in that No Man's Time, which means "no time, in which a man ought to be, and awake, in," of six jests per day at sixpence per jest. Friendships are recorded, cherished pleasures indicated, tastes revealed. The love of the theatre is evident in many an essay, the love of books in still more. The folios, "midnight darlings," cheer the *New Year's Eve*. But that essay is still more closely intimate, and lifts the curtain that shrouds the innermost thoughts and fears of all. It is beautiful, and melancholy, and profoundly human, and absolutely sincere:—

"I begin to count the probabilities of my duration, and to grudge at the expenditure of moments and shortest periods, like miser's farthings. In proportion as the years both lessen and shorten, I set more count upon their periods, and would fain lay my ineffectual finger upon the spoke of the great wheel. I am not content to pass away 'like a weaver's shuttle.' Those metaphors solace me not, nor sweeten the unpalatable draught of mortality. I care not to be carried with the tide, that smoothly bears human life to eternity; and reluct at the inevitable course of destiny. I am in love with this green earth; the face of town and country; the unspeakable rural solitudes, and the sweet security of streets. I would set up my tabernacle here. I am content to stand still at the age to which I am arrived; I, and my friends: to be no younger, no richer, no handsomer. I do not want to be weaned by age; or drop, like mellow fruit, as they say, into the grave.—Any alteration, on this earth of mine, in diet or in

lodging, puzzles and discomposes me. My household-gods plant a terrible fixed foot, and are not rooted up without blood. They do not willingly seek Lavinian shores. A new state of being staggers me."

This was probably one of the passages which caused Southey to lament the want in Elia of a sounder religion. Southey would doubtless have been quite contented had Lamb chanted, like hundreds of congregations, and with as little meaning as they,

> "O Paradise, O Paradise,
> 'Tis weary waiting here."

Yet which is the more soundly religious—this silly insincerity, or that manly truth?

In the style of the passage just quoted there is a touch of Sir Thomas Browne, that "fantastic old great man" whom Lamb loved so well and so wisely. There are many other traces of the same influence elsewhere—traces in thought, in turn of expression, in the use of quaint and unusual words, such as *periegesis*. The matter is of some importance. In point of style Lamb is not wholly a modern. His exquisite but mannered English was based upon the prose masters of the seventeenth century, men like Browne, and Burton of the *Anatomy*, and Fuller. To them he was drawn by a natural kinship. Their thoughts were largely his, their quaintnesses and conceits fitted in with his humour, their antique flavour pleased his critical palate. This natural affinity, combined with the thoroughness of Lamb's knowledge of them, made the imitation—if a thing so natural can be called by that name—successful, and explains the genesis of a style at once unique and, for the purposes to which it is turned, unsurpassed in effectiveness. Though itself based upon models in the past, it is obviously an extremely unsafe style to imitate. No one could advise the student to give his days and his nights to

Lamb, if the purpose was to learn how to write English. An imitation of Lamb, to be successful, would require a conjunction of three qualities. First, there must be the same natural affinity to the seventeenth-century writers; and of this there has been probably no example for a hundred years except Lamb himself. Secondly, there must be the same thorough knowledge; which, though attainable, is nevertheless both rare and difficult. Thirdly, there must be that unfailing tact, that instinct for style which Lamb possessed; and where that is present the possessor will find his own way without advice.

Lamb's style is inseparable from his humour, of which it is the expression. His "whim-whams," as he called them, found their best expression in the quaint words and antique phrases and multiplied and sometimes far-fetched yet never forced comparisons in which he abounds. Strip Elia of these and he is nothing. Neither the brilliancy of Hazlitt, nor the harmony of De Quincey, nor the vigour of Macaulay, nor the eloquence of Ruskin, nor the purity of Goldsmith could for a moment be thought capable of expressing the meaning of Lamb. In argumentative passages no doubt one or other might suffice. Hazlitt might have maintained the thesis of *The Artificial Comedy* with equal skill. But when we come to the most characteristic essays, such as *The Two Races of Men* and *Poor Relations* and *A Chapter on Ears*, what style is conceivable except that in which they are couched? Of no one else is the saying that the style is the man more true than of Lamb. In the deepest sense therefore his style is natural and all his own. Its basis in the seventeenth-century writers is, after all, not so much imitation as the expression of his natural affinity to them.

What is the true character of Lamb's humour? It has been called American by an Englishman, though there is a suggestion of Ireland in the comparison. But apart from the

question of the propriety of attributing sonship to the elder, the comparison is superficial. It means no more than that there is an element of exaggeration in Lamb's humour as there is in American humour. We see it in *A Chapter on Ears*: "Scientifically I could never be made to understand (yet have I taken some pains) what a note of music is; or how one note should differ from another. Much less in voices can I distinguish a soprano from a tenor. Only sometimes the thorough bass can I contrive to guess at, from its being supereminently harsh and disagreeable." The exaggeration is evident. We know that we must not take quite literally this inability to distinguish a soprano from a tenor. We smile without believing when Lamb says he has been practising "God save the King" all his life, and has not arrived within many quavers of it. Exaggeration even greater is, of course, the most conspicuous quality in the humour we call American. But compare Mark Twain's advice to the serenaders to gag their tenor, lest his overweening conceit should tempt him to let out too soon his insufferable screech, and it will be found that the *manner* is wholly different. Besides, exaggeration has by no means the prominence in Lamb's humour that it has in the American. What is there of it, what in the faintest degree suggestive of America, in the far more characteristic opening of the essay just quoted?—

"I have no ear.——

"Mistake me not, reader,—nor imagine that I am by nature destitute of those exterior twin appendages, hanging ornaments, and (architecturally speaking) handsome volutes to the human capital."

Here we are closer to the real Lamb. Here are two characteristics which are far more general in his writings and, what is even more important, far more distinctive of him, than mere exaggeration. That he shares with many, English as well as American; the others are his own. They are, first,

the flavour of antique style; and, secondly, that iteration, anything but damnable, which can be illustrated from a score of other passages. The phrase "handsome volutes to the human capital" is a playful conceit which a seventeenth-century writer might have used seriously and plumed himself upon. The iteration had better be illustrated by a few passages and references. We find it in *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers*. They are "innocent blacknesses" . . . "young Africans of our own growth" . . . "almost clergy imps." Their teeth are "white and shining ossifications." And then (another characteristic) the exquisite skill of the quotation. The display of these "ossifications" is as when

> "A sable cloud
> Turns forth her silver lining on the night."

We find it again in *The Two Races of Men*—in the borrower with his careless, even deportment, his rosy gills, his beautiful reliance on Providence, taking no more thought than lilies, his contempt for money, his liberal confounding of *meum* and *tuum*, his noble simplification of language. But in *Poor Relations* Lamb bursts into a perfect riot of whimsical metaphors:—

"A poor Relation—is the most irrelevant thing in nature, —a piece of impertinent correspondency,—an odious approximation,—a haunting conscience,—a preposterous shadow, lengthening in the noontide of your prosperity,—an unwelcome remembrancer,—a perpetually recurring mortification,—a drain on your purse,—a more intolerable drain on your pride, —a drawback upon success,—a rebuke to your rising,—a stain in your blood,—a blot on your 'scutcheon,—a rent in your garment,—a death's head at your banquet,—Agathocles' pot, —a Mordecai in your grate,—a Lazarus at your door,—a lion in your path,—a frog in your chamber,—a fly in your ointment —a mote in your eye,—a triumph to your enemy,—an apology

to your friends,—the one thing not needful,—the hail in harvest,—the ounce of sour in a pound of sweet."

It is idle to compare this with anything else. It is unique. There is no humorist more original than Lamb.

The element of the grotesque, which is present here, may be further illustrated by the description of Boyer's wigs in *Christ's Hospital*: "He had two wigs, both pedantic, but of differing omen. The one serene, smiling, fresh powdered, betokening a mild day. The other, an old discoloured, unkempt, angry caxon, denoting frequent and bloody execution. Woe to the school, when he made his morning appearance in his *passy*, or *passionate* wig. No comet expounded surer." But there is something of the poetic as well as of the grotesque; and this, too, was characteristic of Lamb. Though he was not much of a poet in verse there is an unmistakable atmosphere of poetry about his more serious prose, and it shows occasionally even in the most humorous essays. There is a touch of the poet in the comparison of the borrower to "the true Propontic which never ebbeth;" there is more than a touch in the reference to "dusty maps of Mexico, dim as dreams" in *The South-Sea House*, and in that fine phrase in *Distant Correspondents*, referring to the changes that may have occurred in the space between the writing and the receipt of the letter—"this confusion of tenses, this grand solecism of *two presents*." The whole of *Dream Children* is poetic, and much of *A Quaker's Meeting*. Frequently the poetic element is brought in under the shape of a literary allusion or quotation which no one could manage more skilfully than Lamb. He drew either from English or from Latin sources, and always with taste.

Lamb must have been conscious that the essays were by far his greatest contribution to literature, and it would have been strange if he had left so remarkable a faculty unused after discovering that he possessed it and finding an outlet for it.

In point of fact essay-writing was his principal literary occupation from 1820, when he began to contribute to *The London Magazine*, to 1833, when the *Last Essays of Elia* appeared. All the essays by which we now know him were thus the product of his intellectual prime and of the fulness of his experience. He was about forty-five when he first wrote under the name of Elia, and fifty-eight when he last used that name. And his days were then numbered. The death of Coleridge in the summer of 1834 shocked him terribly. He was heard to mutter from time to time, Coleridge is dead, Coleridge is dead; and just before the close of the year he himself followed his friend to the universal bourne. The season of Christmas has been peculiarly fatal to great essayists. Two later Christmases were destined to be darkened by the deaths of two others—Macaulay and Thackeray.

In 1824, while Lamb was still writing for *The London Magazine*, there began, in the same periodical, a series of sketches which displayed no small portion of the grace and humour of the master himself. The writer, Mary Russell Mitford (1787–1855), had already produced *Julian*, and while, for the nine years from 1824 to 1832, she was turning off those bright and easy descriptions of village life and thinking lightly enough of them, she continued to batter with tragedies the gates of the temple of fame. She thought she had succeeded in opening them, and her contemporaries agreed with her. We know now that she was right, but that the gates opened, not to the heavy battering, but to the quiet voice of the sketches. Miss Mitford's tragedies are forgotten; her sketches of *Our Village* are among the permanent possessions of English literature. Their charm is woven of many threads. Miss Mitford had a keen eye for character and an equally keen eye for nature. She had humour, sympathy and animation. The whole group of qualities will be found illustrated in almost any of the essays. Take that excellent description of an old

custom then still surviving—*Bramley Maying.* It is spirited from beginning to end, rich in atmosphere, humorous in the sketch of the friendly butcher, who gives "the proper, customary, and unintelligible directions as to the lanes and turnings—first to the right, then to the left, then round Farmer Jennings' close, then across the Holy Brook, then to the right again." In *The Wood*, or in *The Fall of the Leaf*, indeed everywhere, we see evidence of her keen feeling for nature. Her eye was very alert in her country walks, and her mind active. Quiet as her themes are, her treatment of them is always animated. Description, which is often dreary, is never so in her, for it is so rapid. One point leads without pause to another; still life is enlivened with life that is anything but still; occasionally, but rarely, a great public question is touched in passing—just touched, for to dwell upon it would be to introduce the worst sort of irrelevance—a thing that is out of harmony with the spirit of the piece. A passage from *Violeting* illustrates all this variety and animation:—

"We have the good fortune to live in an unenclosed parish, and may thank the wise obstinacy of two or three sturdy farmers, and the lucky unpopularity of a ranting madcap lord of the manor, for preserving the delicious green patches, the islets of wilderness amidst cultivation, which form, perhaps, the peculiar beauty of English scenery. The common that I am passing now—the lea, as it is called—is one of the loveliest of these favoured spots. It is a little sheltered scene, retiring, as it were, from the village; sunk amidst higher lands—hills would be almost too grand a word: edged on one side by one gay highroad, and intersected by another; and surrounded by a most picturesque confusion of meadows, cottages, farms, and orchards; with a great pond in one corner, usually bright and clear, giving a delightful cheerfulness and daylight to the picture. The swallows haunt that pond; so do the

children. There is a merry group round it now; I have seldom seen it without one. Children love water; clear, bright, sparkling water; it excites and feeds their curiosity; it is motion and life."

Men are children of a larger growth; they too love motion and life, and it is the description that seems to move and live that they will longest read.

This love of movement naturally led Miss Mitford to blend the living things of her village with its scenery. The greyhound Mayflower, the "sort of a kind of a spaniel" Dash, a ewe with her lame lamb, all are noticed; and still more the human actors on the scene. She has her *dramatis personæ* as essayist, no less than as tragedian. Her character-sketches are the most delightful of all her writings—*Olive Hathaway*, a charming picture of a little lame village mantua-maker; *Old Master Green*, "a veteran of the tap-room, one to whom strong beer had been for nearly seventy years the best friend and the worst enemy, making him happy and keeping him poor;" *Modern Antiques*, "two complete and remarkable specimens of the ladies of eighty years ago—ladies cased inwardly and outwardly in Addison and whalebone." These are three examples out of many, and if they are among the best, there are not a few others well worthy of comparison with them. And such sketches are to be found not only in the papers which bear human names or suggest human activity. *The Dell* is as much concerned with the farmer and his wife as with the scene, and *The Hard Summer* is more occupied with boys than with weather. Naturally Miss Mitford more frequently depicts her own sex than the other; but nothing in the village is alien to her, and it says much for her tolerance and broad humanity that she finds a good deal to say, both skilfully and wisely, about the boy:—

"I plead guilty to a strong partiality towards that unpopular class of beings, country boys; I have a large

acquaintance amongst them, and I can almost say, that I know good of many and harm of none. In general, they are an open, spirited, good-humoured race, with a proneness to embrace the pleasures and eschew the evils of their condition, a capacity for happiness, quite unmatched in man, or woman, or girl. They are patient, too, and bear their fate as scape-goats (for all sins whatsoever are laid, as matters of course, to their door), whether at home or abroad, with amazing resignation; and, considering the many lies of which they are the objects, they tell wonderfully few in return. The worst that can be said of them is, that they seldom, when grown to man's estate, keep the promise of their boyhood; but that is a fault to come—a fault that may not come, and ought not to be anticipated. It is astonishing how sensible they are to notice from their betters, or those whom they think such. I do not speak of money, or gifts, or praise, or the more coarse and common briberies—they are more delicate courtiers; a word, a nod, a smile, or the mere calling of them by their names, is enough to ensure their heart and their services."

If any one requires a reason better than the pleasure of it for reading *Our Village*, he may find it in the fact that the book depicts a rural England which is to a considerable degree a thing of the past. The "haunts of ancient peace" are rarer now than they were when Tennyson was a boy and Miss Mitford a woman of middle age. But such as they were when industrialism was but half developed and railways were not yet, they will nowhere be found more charmingly delineated than in that beautiful and wise and generously human book, *Our Village*.

Hazlitt has been dealt with elsewhere, and De Quincey soon became a member of the *Blackwood* group; but as *The London Magazine* was the medium of publication of the work for which he is still most famous, he may fairly be treated along with Lamb and Miss Mitford. Of Thomas de Quincey (1785-

1859) it may be said that he has left little that is not close to, if not within, the province of the essay; and yet he was a man whom nature did not intend for an essayist. It was his defects rather than his merits that made him one, and so, though the bulk of his writings can hardly be brought under any other head, there is scarcely anything he has left that can be regarded as a wholly satisfactory example of the essay form. The perfect essay is brief, and, though it may be discursive, it has nevertheless a unity of its own; but if any law guides the wanderings of De Quincey, it is often very hard to discover.

De Quincey divided his own works into three sections, to one of which he gave the general name of essays. But he uses the word in a sense in one way narrower, in another perhaps wider, than that in which it is employed in this book. The examples he chooses to comment upon are *The Essenes*, *The Cæsars*, and *Cicero*. Now *The Cæsars* fills the greater part of a volume. It appears that De Quincey means by essay history or philosophy in the making; for there is no reason why the two former papers should not have been expanded, the one into a history of Rome in the imperial period, the other into a philosophical treatise on the nature of Christianity and its relation to the teaching of the Essenes. No reason, or rather none except that infirmity of will and instability of purpose which forbade De Quincey, as it forbade Coleridge, his fellow-victim to opium, to realise more than a fraction of that which was within him. He had the scholarship, the intellectual interest and the speculative power necessary for the construction of massive works of either the historical or the philosophical sort; but in him as in his friend John Wilson, "the central tie-beam" was wanting, and thus he was condemned to produce merely fragments. His 'essays' therefore are literally attempts at the various subjects with which they deal. They bear the sort of relation to what he might have written that the essays of Macaulay bear to his history,

or Carlyle's *Diamond Necklace* to his *French Revolution.* There is an incompleteness about them all.

De Quincey further explains that he includes under the name of essays "those papers which address themselves purely to the understanding as an insulated faculty; or do so primarily;" and he adds that generally he claims "the merit of rectification applied to absolute errors, or to injurious limitations of the truth." The essay, then, so understood, is part of the literature of knowledge, and has nothing directly to do with the literature of power. The pure play of fancy or imagination, whether serious or humorous, is excluded; there is no room for Lamb's *Dream Children* or for his *Roast Pig.* But there is room for many of De Quincey's papers. There is room for such an exercise of critical ingenuity as *Judas Iscariot.* There is room for papers illustrative of his learning, like the essays on Bentley and on *The Pagan Oracles;* for biographical papers, like his *Goldsmith* and *Goethe;* for papers on the philosophy of literature, like his *Style* and his *Theory of Greek Tragedy;* and for that peculiarly interesting group of criticisms on contemporaries—Coleridge, Wordsworth, Lamb, Hazlitt—where the value imparted by De Quincey's native acumen is indefinitely increased by the fact that he is an authority at first hand and as such can never be superseded. Elsewhere his deplorable incapacity to concentrate enormously diminishes the value of his work; but students must always turn back to discover what impression these men produced on a contemporary so well qualified to understand them and so highly gifted with the power of expression. Even of those whom he did not personally know his criticisms, though marred by diffuseness, are worthy of careful consideration. Probably no contemporary but Coleridge had given more thought to the principles of criticism, and none but Coleridge had, on occasion, more power of illuminative suggestion—witness *The Knocking at*

the Gate in Macbeth. We should owe him gratitude were it only for that admirable distinction between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power, which was borrowed from him above.

The De Quincey whom we commonly think of now, however, is rather the De Quincey of the other two sections of his work, which are not essays according to his use of the word, but are partly so according to the meaning here assigned to it. One of these sections he describes as embracing those papers which propose primarily to amuse the reader, and he selects for illustration the *Autobiographic Sketches*, though he adds that these include parts which have a higher aim. The delightful *Sketches* are too extensive in scope to be classified under the heading of 'essay,' but among his works there are several papers which he would probably have placed in this section, and which seem to be essays in the wider acceptation of the word. Such are those admirable narratives, *The Revolt of the Tartars* and *The Spanish Military Nun.* Both illustrate De Quincey's besetting sin of diffuseness, but both nevertheless show a masterly skill in marshalling events and presenting them to the reader's mind in their due gradation of importance, and both carry him along on a stream of musical sentences. Such too is the famous essay in the form of a lecture on *Murder, considered as one of the Fine Arts*, which Stevenson no doubt had in mind when he wrote *The Suicide Club.* De Quincey's essay has suffered at the hands of time, and will hardly be read now with the enthusiastic admiration it once inspired. The gruesome but impressive *Postscript* has worn better. Still, the essay itself, if not quite a masterpiece, is a fine thing; and it is especially interesting as one of the few examples of successful humour in De Quincey. Humour was a gift he evidently believed himself to possess, and he is constantly attempting to show it, with unfortunate results. Many an essay is at once needlessly enlarged and

marred by pages of thin jocularity, most commonly at th beginning, but frequently enough embedded in the body of th paper too.

There remains the third and last section, which De Quincey rightly considered to be a far higher class of composition than the others. It embraces *The English Opium-Eater* and the *Suspiria de Profundis.* It embraces likewise parts of the *Autobiographic Sketches*;—those parts to which the author himself refers as having a higher aim than the ordinary stream of the narrative. Clearly also it embraces parts of *The English Mail-Coach.* A portion at least of this division of his works falls within the province of the essay; and so De Quincey has to be considered as the re-creator for the nineteenth century of that impassioned prose which the seventeenth century had known and the eighteenth had forgotten. It is by far his most memorable achievement. Not since Sir Thomas Browne had such effects as his been produced; without him Ruskin as æsthetic critic would have been something different from the man we know.

No one knew better than De Quincey himself where the excellence of his style lay, for he applied to his own work that talent for critical analysis which enabled him to detect both beauty and defect in others. But it is not given to any man to be a complete critic of himself, and while De Quincey understood perfectly well the excellence, it is certain that he was not so fully aware of the defect; otherwise he would have pruned away his redundancies and spared the reader many page of matter so trivial and thought so superficial that ven the most melodious English cannot conceal the inherent overty. Still, he was partly aware of this defect too. here is a passage in his essay on Charles Lamb which rows an instructive light upon his conception of himself. ter commenting upon Lamb's insensibility to music he ceeds:—

"It was a corollary from the same large *substratum* in his nature, that Lamb had no sense of the rhythmical in prose composition. Rhythmus, or pomp of cadence, or sonorous ascent of clauses, in the structure of sentences, were effects of art as much thrown away upon *him* as the voice of the charmer upon the deaf adder. We ourselves, occupying the very station of polar opposition to that of Lamb, being as morbidly, perhaps, in the one excess as he in the other, naturally detected this omission in Lamb's nature at an early stage in our acquaintance."

In the author's own view, then, De Quincey's style is based upon the use of the periodic sentence, and the grand object in the construction of the sentence is to secure volume of sound, pomp of cadence. The individual word is important, it is true. Every scholarly instinct in De Quincey cried out against the misuse of words in respect of meaning. Again and again he digresses to explain the accurate and scholarly use of a word which is suggested to him as he writes, just as Ruskin afterwards digressed for the same purpose and insisted upon the importance of knowing the history of words. So too every musical instinct was outraged by the use of a word ill-sounding either in itself or in the context, and he dilates upon the immeasurable pains he took to find just the right word for the place. Still, though all this was indispensable, it was only a means to an end—the harmonious, sonorous, swinging sentence. But the most interesting point in the passage quoted is the suggestion that he himself is perhaps as morbidly in the one excess as Lamb is in the other. And this is exactly the truth. Where De Quincey falls short of greatness is in the substance of his work. Pomp of language, merely as such, has a charm of its own. R. L. Stevenson found great comfort in the name Jehovah Tsidkenu, when he knew nothing about its meaning. Still, for most men, sound has to be supported by sense, and there must be a reasonable

proportion between the one and the other—the little fishes must not talk like whales. Pomp of speech is fitted for great occasions. Pericles pronouncing the funeral oration over the dead Athenians, Abraham Lincoln consecrating for all time the soil of Gettysburg already consecrated with blood, not only may but must be stately. But Pericles giving an inventory of the resources of Athens is simply business-like, and no one could be more homely than Lincoln habitually was.

Now if De Quincey had preserved this perfect balance between sound and meaning he would have been equal to the greatest of English prose-writers; perhaps he would have been the greatest of all, for it is doubtful whether any one else, except Sir Thomas Browne, has written so much prose with the highest qualities of rhythm. But the balance is not perfectly kept. The opium dreams are gorgeous, but somewhat too vapoury. Bring him to the test of a comparison with the passages quoted in an earlier chapter from Browne. In the elder writer there is a backbone of thought such as we do not find in De Quincey. Browne is a dreamer, it is true, but his dreams have a savour of reality. The ashes of an urn call up the whole pageant of human history. Contrast with this *Dream-Fugue*, or any part of it:—

"Sweet funeral bells from some incalculable distance, wailing over the dead that die before the dawn, awakened me as I slept in a boat moored to some familiar shore. The morning twilight even then was breaking; and, by the dusky revelations which it spread, I saw a girl, adorned with a garland of white roses about her head for some great festival, running along the solitary strand in extremity of haste. Her running was the running of panic; and often she looked back as to some dreadful enemy in the rear. But when I leaped ashore, and followed in her steps to warn her of a peril in front, alas! from me she fled as from another peril, and vainly I shouted to her

of quicksands that lay ahead. Faster and faster she ran; round a promontory of rocks she wheeled out of sight; in an instant I also wheeled round it, but only to see the treacherous sands gathering above her head. Already her person was buried; only the fair young head and the diadem of white roses around it were still visible to the pitying heavens; and, last of all, was visible one white marble arm. I saw by the early twilight this fair young head, as it was sinking down to darkness—saw this marble arm, as it rose above her head and her treacherous grave, tossing, faltering, rising, clutching, as at some false deceiving hand stretched out from the clouds—saw this marble arm uttering her dying hope, and then uttering her dying despair. The head, the diadem, the arm—these all had sunk; at last over these also the cruel quicksand had closed; and no memorial of the fair young girl remained on earth, except my own solitary tears, and the funeral bells from the desert seas that, rising again more softly, sang a requiem over the grave of the buried child, and over her blighted dawn."

Here certainly are rhythmus and pomp of cadence. For sheer skill in writing how many have lived who could equal it? Very few; but Browne at least could, and Browne could, in addition, now express and now suggest thought such as we nowhere find in De Quincey. The latter falls short therefore of the greatest; but we must be thankful for what he could do and did. Such musical English is itself precious. And besides, on a lower plane of style, how surely, when he was fully himself, he could hit his mark. Instances have been mentioned already—*The Revolt of the Tartars*, *The Spanish Military Nun*. But further, in that essay, *The English Mail-Coach*, of which *Dream-Fugue* is a part, this power is admirably illustrated in the first section, *The Glory of Motion*. Where else is there such a vivid description of the effect of the swift rush of the horses? Dickens has touched the theme,

but he is crude in comparison with De Quincey. And where else is such an impression conveyed of the suspense of England in those years of war; of the joy of the news of victory, and the grief from the sense of bereavement? To him who produced such effects we owe a debt of gratitude; and though he is not among the greatest, though he had grave faults, he is nevertheless among our benefactors.

The year 1820 was memorable not only for *The London Magazine* but for the establishment of *The Retrospective Review* (1820-1828), to whose excellence in criticism Professor Saintsbury has borne emphatic testimony. Among the contributors was Lamb's friend and literary executor, Thomas Noon Talfourd (1795-1854), whose articles in it and in *The New Monthly Magazine* are marked alike by vigour of understanding and by generosity of spirit. These newer publications all reverted, as regards the periods of their publication, to the custom of the eighteenth-century magazines, the departure from which by the quarterlies was so curiously disturbing to the mind of an old-fashioned editor. *The Athenæum* and *The Spectator*, when they appeared in 1828, still further shortened the interval between issues to one week. They addressed a class, however, not widely different from that to which the quarterlies and the monthlies alike appealed—the upper and upper middle classes. But an important step, in that sense downwards, was taken in 1832 by *Chambers's Journal*, the organ of the brothers William and Robert Chambers. Its establishment marks a distinct stage in the democratisation of literature. As publishers the brothers worked for this end, and sometimes the very titles of their publications proclaimed their purpose—for example, *Information for the People*. They were a potent force in that movement which Peacock satirised in the phrase, the Steam Intellect Society. With reference to his contributions to the *Journal* itself, the younger and more literary of the brothers wrote that it was his design from the

first to be the essayist of the middle class; and by that he meant a class which no essayist had yet addressed.

Robert Chambers (1802–1871) was a person of remarkable gifts. When he was still a young man he astonished Scott by the extent of his information about old Edinburgh, and in middle life he raised no small commotion by his *Vestiges of Creation*, a theory of evolution before the days of evolution. But besides substantive books he wrote some hundreds of essays to the *Journal*. They are of the most varied kinds—"gay, grave, sentimental, philosophical,"—but Chambers rarely fails to be interesting. To be interesting was his deliberate aim. "Everywhere," he says, "I have sought less to attain elegance or observe refinement, than to avoid that last of literary sins—dulness." His reward is that he may still be read with enjoyment and with profit. He had a great power of imparting interest through his knowledge of detail; and he had a surprising amount of information on many other subjects as well as on Edinburgh. A paper on *Long Livers* affords an example of this power. His pleasant humour is seen in *The Innocent Railway*, an amusing account of a journey from Edinburgh to Dalkeith; and again in *Handles*, an ingenious application of the idea that the most peculiar and "difficult" men are most easily managed once the "handle" has been found. In Jonson's language, it is necessary to understand the humour. Thus, "A wife of any ingenuity might in great measure dress herself off her husband's hurricanes." The secret is, to submit and make him penitent. Humour is the essence likewise of the excellent essay entitled *The Struggles of Adolescence*, for which search has to be made in the old volumes of the *Journal*; for it has been strangely omitted from the tolerably copious selections.

Another notable periodical which also produced genuine and memorable literature was Hugh Miller's (1802–1856)

paper, *The Witness*, which was the organ of the Scottish Disruption. Rarely has a periodical founded for a purpose so polemical left anything of permanent value; but the editor was a man of notable literary gifts, and his own contributions, even if they stood alone, would entitle *The Witness* to a place in literary history. In its columns appeared both *The Old Red Sandstone* and *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, the works by which Miller is best remembered. These, though they have in part the character of essays, have collectively a wider range than the word can legitimately cover. But besides, Miller was the author of an extraordinary number of papers on miscellaneous subjects. He was a fertile as well as an inflexibly honest journalist. He was the leader-writer of his own paper; and the volume of *Leading Articles* printed under his name is of a quality to which journalism rarely attains. The interest of many of the articles has waned with the passing of the matters to which they refer; but there are others which are still fresh. There is pungent satire in the article entitled *Criticism—Internal Evidence;* and there is a touch of imagination in the comparison between the elaborate and formal sentences of the time of Dugald Stewart and the manner in which the writers wore their hair—"the period is contemporary with the peruke—the period is the peruke of style." But naturally there is more material that is still interesting in the *Essays, Historical and Biographical, Political and Social, Literary and Scientific.* These, we are told, are the gleanings from about a thousand articles, contributed during Miller's sixteen years' editorship of *The Witness;* and this in addition to the multitude of leading articles written during the same years. The *Essays* are journalistic; but it is the journalism of a man of literary genius, and of one who, like Scott, had as much sense as genius. They show that he possessed a keen and penetrating eye, wide sympathies and clear intelligence. The biographical ones display a just

appreciation of character, the critical ones genuine literary taste, and the social ones sound and balanced judgment. For humour combined with political wisdom it would be hard to beat the hypothesis, as instructive as it is amusing, in *Crime-making Laws*: "If there was a special law enacted against all red-headed men, and all six-feet high, red-headed men and men six feet high would in a short time become exceedingly dangerous characters." And Miller proceeds to prove his assertion. It is another aspect of the truth embodied in the quotation from Coleridge regarding Sir Alexander Ball.[1]

If Hugh Miller had stood alone he would have made *The Witness* memorable. But he did not stand alone. To *The Witness* we owe the introduction to literature of one of the most exquisite of our later essayists—Dr. John Brown (1810-1882). In his case the professional title is inseparable from the man, though we think of him as man of letters, not as physician. He is one of that fortunate group of writers who, though not among the very great, are hardly less sure of permanent fame, because they have done one thing supremely well. He is for all time the laureate of the dog. From Homer down to Scott the greatest writers have shown their love of the friend of man; but not one of them all has left proof in writing that he possessed such a profound knowledge of the psychology of the dog as Brown. To Brown we owe not only the great Rab. In that exquisite piece, half-story, half-essay, the dog shares the honours with his human friends, the noble old woman and her husband, rough, but noble too; and the reader thinks most perhaps of that touching scene where in her delirium the dying woman reveals her undying love of the child who had been "in the Kingdom forty years and mair." But in *Our Dogs* the creatures we call lower fill the field—nearly, not altogether; for there are delightful

[1] See ante Chap. VIII

touches on Brown's father, his Rhadamanthine grandmother, and other members of the family. Still, the dogs are the principal figures—the inimitable Toby, Wylie "the wee fell yin," Wasp the marvellous mother, Jock, who "was insane from his birth," and John Pym, who must have been related to the dog whose "life was fu' o' sairiousness" because he could not get "enuff o' fechtin'." There is no other dog in all literature equal to Toby. There have been many more beautiful, for Toby was "the most utterly shabby, vulgar, mean-looking cur" his owner ever beheld; and yet in a deeper sense there is none so beautiful, for none has found a *vates sacer* to delineate him with such loving care, from his ethics—he was "a dog of great moral excellence"—to his unique tail, of which we are told that it "was a tail *per se;* it was of immense girth and not short, equal throughout like a policeman's baton; the machinery for working it was of great power, and acted in a way, as far as I have been able to discover, quite original."

This is Brown in his lighter mood, whimsically humorous; but no reader of *Rab and his Friends* can doubt that he had a graver mood as well. Though he has written best on dogs, or on men and women in some relation to dogs, he had no inconsiderable range of interests and gifts. He was highly skilled in drawing character-sketches—witness his *Letter to John Cairns* about his own father, and his paper on Mr. Syme. *Marjorie Fleming* is a mosaic of quotations from the wonderful child herself, but they are put together with genius. *Minchmoor* and *The Enterkin* illustrate his feeling for nature and his power of conveying the impression of natural scenes, which is a better thing than describing them. His exquisitely delicate gift of literary criticism is shown in *Oh, I'm wat, wat;* and *Notes on Art* proves that he had the same gift for the criticism of painting. Few have possessed such a power of transcribing a picture into words. Take for example his

description of the British Lion's head in Leech's "Disraeli measuring the British Lion":—

"What a leonine simpleton! What a visage! How much is in it, and how much not! Look at his shirt collar and chubby cheek! What hair! copious and rank as the son of Manoah's, each particular hair growing straight out into space, and taking its own noway particular way; his honest, simple eyes, well apart; his snub, infantile nose; his long upper lip, unreclaimed as No-man's-land, or the Libyan desert, unstubbed as 'Thornaby Waaste'; his mouth closed, and down at the corner, partly from stomach in discontent (Giles is always dyspeptic), partly from contempt of the same."

An imagination akin to the poetic, humour, ready power of illustrating from literature and from art, and a sound psychology, are the qualities which give Brown's papers their value. His metaphors are illuminating—as when, in the paper on Mr. Syme, he speaks of Syme as "a solar man," who "had his planets pacing faithfully about him;" his illustrations are happy—as when, in the same paper, he describes the orchid "radiant in beauty, white, with a brown freckle, like Imogen's breast, and like it, 'right proud of that most delicate lodging.'" The fineness of his psychology is shown in the character-sketches; or the paper on John Leech may be quoted in illustration: "Like all true humourists, he had the tragic sense and power—for as is the height so is the depth, as is the mirth so is the melancholy; Loch Lomond is deepest when Ben dips into it." But over all is the impression of Brown himself, observant, sympathetic, sensitive; and the deepest debt of the reader is for the privilege of intercourse with a beautiful and pure mind.

Fraser's Magazine had come into the field two years before *Chambers's Journal*. For sheer weight of genius its staff surpassed any that has ever gathered round an English magazine, for it included Coleridge, Carlyle and Thackeray;

but it hardly equalled *The London Magazine* in respect of those gifts which make the essayist. Coleridge and Carlyle are treated elsewhere. Both, like Thackeray himself, are more eminent in other spheres of literature than as essayists; but, unlike them, Thackeray had in very liberal measure the temperament of the essayist. He has moreover practised the art of essay-writing to an extent which many hardly realise. Every one knows the *Roundabout Papers*, and every one looks upon them as a collection of essays. But *The Book of Snobs* is a collection of essays too, and, though it is thrown into the form of letters from an uncle to a nephew, *Sketches and Travels in London* is another. Further, it is one which should be read as a corrective to *The Book of Snobs*; for the latter by itself leaves a somewhat painful impression. Not that *The Book of Snobs* is wholly without a corrective in itself. It is true the author preaches the universality of snobbery: "If you want to moralise on the mutability of human affairs, go and see the figure of Gorgius in his real, identical robes, at the wax-work. Admittance one shilling. Children and flunkeys sixpence. *Go, and pay sixpence*." But there are degrees of offensiveness in snobbery. About snobbery in high places Thackeray's satire is stinging. He writes bitterly of *The Court Circular* and all its meannesses. The German King-Consort of Portugal, he tells us, had a keeper to load his guns, who handed them to a nobleman, who handed them to the Prince, who blazed away. All concerned were snobs, but the keeper was the least snobbish. There is bitterness also in the satire of the "brutal, ignorant, peevish bully of an Englishman," who travels over the Continent with his eyes blind and his ears deaf to all beauty, goes to church only to call the practices there degrading and superstitious, "as if *his* altar was the only one that was acceptable," and is moved by nothing, "except when a very great man comes his way, and then the rigid, proud, self-confident, inflexible British Snob can be as humble as a flunkey and as supple as a

harlequin." Sometimes Thackeray's indignation is fierce, but sometimes again it is tempered with pity. There are characters and callings which he cannot touch without tenderness. The Clerical Snob is defended, not attacked. "May this pen," he exclaims, "never write a pennyworth more if it ever casts ridicule upon" him or his calling.

Nevertheless, in order to see this other side of Thackeray in its real proportion we must go elsewhere than to *The Book of Snobs*. The *Sketches and Travels in London* have plenty of satire, but most of the themes are lightly touched. It is full of worldly wisdom in the good sense of the phrase, and the easy chatty manner is delightful. That spirit of chivalry and that reverence for good women which lay deep down in the heart of Thackeray are freely revealed. *On the Pleasures of being a Fogy* shows him in his lighter mood, and *A Dinner in the City* is bright with the half-playful, half-serious love of good cheer. "Next to eating good dinners," he says, "a healthy man with a benevolent turn of mind must like, I think, to read about them. When I was a boy, I had by heart the Barmecide's feast in the 'Arabian Nights'; and the culinary passages in Scott's novels (in which works there is a deal of good eating) always were my favourites. The Homeric poems are full, as everybody knows, of roast and boiled: and every year I look forward with pleasure to the newspapers of the 10th of November for the *menu* of the Lord Mayor's feast, which is sure to appear in those journals. What student of history is there who does not remember the City dinner given to the Allied Sovereigns in 1814? It is good even now, and to read it ought to make a man hungry, had he had five meals that day."

On the other hand, some of the papers are serious enough, and a few are sombre in the extreme. *Waiting at the Station*—thoughts suggested by the sight of thirty-eight women emigrants to Australia—is gloomy with the sense of an awful

poverty, and of the great gulf between the well-dressed and the poor. *The Curate's Walk*, that sad contrast to *A Dinner in the City*, shows the same interest in social questions and close observation of the conditions of life, combined with a special tenderness towards the children of the poor. *Going to see a Man Hanged* is a powerful and impressive account of the actual emotions of the writer at an execution. The greater part of it would be almost too painful to quote, but, as a matter by the way, it embodies an effective satire of the party system in politics which is still worth bearing in mind: "Three hundred and ten gentlemen of good fortune, able for the most part to quote Horace, declare solemnly that unless Sir Robert comes in, the nation is ruined. Three hundred and fifteen on the other side swear by their great gods that the safety of the nation depends upon Lord John; and to this end they quote Horace too." A certain percentage of the gentlemen are no longer of good fortune, and comparatively few of them can quote Horace; but in essence there has been no change.

In the *Christmas Books* and in the *Sketch Books* too there are essays; but unquestionably Thackeray the essayist is seen at his best in the delightful *Roundabout Papers.* The very title is felicitous. The author rambles both in his choice of theme and in his manner of treatment. Anything will serve him, from the death of a great general or a great author to a chalk mark on a door; and the range of tone is from heroism to boyish playfulness. The latter tone is audible in the pleasantly rambling paper *On some late great Victories*, with its gleeful delight over the success of *The Cornhill Magazine*, the former in *Strange to say, on Club Paper*, and in *On a Joke I heard from the late Thomas Hood.* The last-mentioned paper well illustrates Thackeray's method; for he does not tell the joke which the title proclaims to be the subject of his essay. His remark about Montaigne, that an essay might bear almost

any title, is not without its application to himself. But he himself has given the best description of his own method: "In these humble essaykins I have taken leave to egotize. I cry out about the shoes which pinch me, and, as I fancy, more naturally and pathetically than if my neighbour's corns were trodden under foot. I prattle about the dish which I love, the wine which I like, the talk I heard yesterday—about Brown's absurd airs—Jones's ridiculous elation when he thinks he has caught me in a blunder (a part of the fun, you see, is that Jones will read this, and will perfectly well know I mean him, and that we shall meet and grin at one another with entire politeness). This is not the highest kind of speculation, I confess, but it is a gossip which amuses some folks. A brisk and honest small-beer will refresh those who do not care for the frothy outpourings of heavier taps. A two of clubs may be a good handy little card sometimes, and able to tackle a king of diamonds, if it is a little trump. Some philosophers get their wisdom with deep thought, and out of ponderous libraries; I pick up my small crumbs of cogitation at a dinner-table; or from Mrs. Mary and Miss Louisa, as they are prattling over their five o'clock tea."

All the leading characteristics of Thackeray could be illustrated from the *Roundabout Papers*—his healthy scepticism, the warmth of heart and sensitiveness that corrected it, his tendency to preach—everything that specially characterises him as a novelist. There is a touch of the sardonic in his treatment of such popular sayings as have an optimistic cast: "You say, *Magna est veritas, et prævalebit.* Psha! Great lies are as great as great truths, and prevail constantly, and day after day." And he proceeds to support his view with examples which are hardly to be denied. But the warmth of heart is abundantly evident in what he wrote about Macaulay and Hood and Lord Clyde; and *Thorns in the Cushion* is evidence of a sensitiveness that is even excessive. As to the

preacher, he is to be seen everywhere; but of all the innumerable sermons Thackeray preached, there is none that more unmistakably bears his own stamp than *On being Found Out*: "Would you have your wife and children know you exactly for what you are, and esteem you precisely at your worth? If so, my friend, you will live in a dreary house, and you will have but a chilly fireside. Do you suppose the people round it don't see your homely face as under a glamour, and, as it were, with a halo of love round it? You don't fancy you *are*, as you seem to them? No such thing, my man. Put away that monstrous conceit, and be thankful that *they* have not found you out."

He who wishes, however, to find a compendium of the man Thackeray must turn to the paper entitled *Ogres*. Nowhere else probably is there so perfect a conspectus of his qualities in such brief compass. There is embodied in it both that which people call his cynicism, his hatred of shams, and what students know as his chivalrous tenderness. The more sardonic side of the man is seen in his remarks on the number and variety of ogres. They are as omnipresent as the snobs themselves. They are of many kinds, and are found in all ages and under all sorts of disguises. They are by no means all ugly—nor are the ugly the most dangerous. The ugly Polyphemus was an ogre. "But so were the Sirens ogres—pretty blue-eyed things, peeping at you coaxingly from out of the water, and singing their melodious wheedles. And the bones round their caves were more numerous than the ribs, skulls and thigh-bones round the cavern of hulking Polyphemus." This is one phase of Thackeray, more playfully revealed than it is in some other passages. The opposite phase is shown in the adjuration to men of his own profession: "Ah ye knights of the pen! May honour be your shield, and truth tip your lances! Be gentle to all gentle people. Be modest to women. Be tender to children. And as for the Ogre Humbug, out

sword and have at him." Through all his literary life Thackeray with rare consistency did the very thing he here enjoins upon others. The picture of himself drawn by himself charms the reader in all his writings; and it is this tendency to self-delineation that makes him a great essayist—an essayist of the centre.

CHAPTER X

THE HISTORIAN-ESSAYISTS

There was no class of writers to whom the rise of the reviews and magazines proved more convenient than it did to the historians. Their subject, being human, was of wide interest, so that it commended itself to editors; and the historians were practised in the art of expression, so that they could present it attractively. Further, it was a subject easily susceptible of subdivision. The man who has undertaken the history of a great period is not thereby precluded from discussing side issues as they arise, or delineating the great characters with whom his studies have made him familiar, or presenting conclusions which he means afterwards to embody in the longer work. On the contrary, he is just the man who above all others is capable of doing this; and it may be desirable from every point of view that he should do it. A Gibbon might by choice as well as of necessity move alone on his stately march to the fall of the Roman Empire; but there were others who were not so circumstanced that they could thus postpone gain as well as fame for half a life-time. It was the difficulty of finding practicable alternatives that made the path of letters in the eighteenth century so rugged that even Johnson only just managed to live. It was this that made dedications so tumid and gave them a tone so fulsome that we can scarcely refrain from blushing as we read. The question of pot-boiling is one from which the literary man can no more escape than the laundry-woman; and the machinery of publication whereby the indispensable fuel is supplied has to be seriously considered in connexion with the history of literature. The

nineteenth century was as much subject to this necessity as the eighteenth; but it had resources which were undeveloped then, and these modified though they could not do away with the difficulties. Carlyle had to earn his bread, and it was a serious matter for the household in Cheyne Row when in 1835 he recorded that it was now nearly two years since he had earned anything by literature. For some eight years before that he had lived mainly by contributions to periodicals. Had they not existed, could he ever have devoted himself to the French Revolution? Macaulay too had to earn his bread; but he, more fortunate than Carlyle, was popular. The point, however, is that for some years reviewing was his mainstay. In a doggerel epistle addressed to his sisters—one of those which give such a charming view of the great author's home life—he enumerates as a principal item of his wealth the "ninety pounds at least" which the editor of the Yellow and Blue owes him for his last review.

Of the historian-essayists Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) is by far the richest and profoundest. But his essays have been overshadowed by his greater works, and though everybody is aware of the excellence of some of them, comparatively few appreciate the fact that almost the complete Carlyle could be reconstructed from the *Miscellanies* alone. They stretch across the whole of his literary life, from *Richter* in 1827 to *Shooting Niagara* in 1867; and though the papers are sparse after the first twenty years, still his occasional utterances help to link up the successive stages of his career. They touch upon all the great departments of his literary activity: they are critical, biographical, historical, social and political. Unquestionably the loss would be enormous if *Sartor* and the *French Revolution* and *Frederick* were gone, but all the characteristic dogmas and beliefs would still be found expressed in one or other of the essays. Thus, one of the greatest of Carlyle's services was his mediation between the mind of

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THE HISTORIAN-ESSAYISTS

THERE was no class of writers to whom the rise of the reviews and magazines proved more convenient than it did to the historians. Their subject, being human, was of wide interest, so that it commended itself to editors; and the historians were practised in the art of expression, so that they could present it attractively. Further, it was a subject easily susceptible of subdivision. The man who has undertaken the history of a great period is not thereby precluded from discussing side issues as they arise, or delineating the great characters with whom his studies have made him familiar, or presenting conclusions which he means afterwards to embody in the longer work. On the contrary, he is just the man who above all others is capable of doing this; and it may be desirable from every point of view that he should do it. A Gibbon might by choice as well as of necessity move alone on his stately march to the fall of the Roman Empire; but there were others who were not so circumstanced that they could thus postpone gain as well as fame for half a life-time. It was the difficulty of finding practicable alternatives that made the path of letters in the eighteenth century so rugged that even Johnson only just managed to live. It was this that made dedications so tumid and gave them a tone so fulsome that we can scarcely refrain from blushing as we read. The question of pot-boiling is one from which the literary man can no more escape than the laundry-woman; and the machinery of publication whereby the indispensable fuel is supplied has to be seriously considered in connexion with the history of literature. The

nineteenth century was as much subject to this necessity as the eighteenth; but it had resources which were undeveloped then, and these modified though they could not do away with the difficulties. Carlyle had to earn his bread, and it was a serious matter for the household in Cheyne Row when in 1835 he recorded that it was now nearly two years since he had earned anything by literature. For some eight years before that he had lived mainly by contributions to periodicals. Had they not existed, could he ever have devoted himself to the French Revolution? Macaulay too had to earn his bread; but he, more fortunate than Carlyle, was popular. The point, however, is that for some years reviewing was his mainstay. In a doggerel epistle addressed to his sisters—one of those which give such a charming view of the great author's home life—he enumerates as a principal item of his wealth the "ninety pounds at least" which the editor of the Yellow and Blue owes him for his last review.

Of the historian-essayists Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) is by far the richest and profoundest. But his essays have been overshadowed by his greater works, and though everybody is aware of the excellence of some of them, comparatively few appreciate the fact that almost the complete Carlyle could be reconstructed from the *Miscellanies* alone. They stretch across the whole of his literary life, from *Richter* in 1827 to *Shooting Niagara* in 1867; and though the papers are sparse after the first twenty years, still his occasional utterances help to link up the successive stages of his career. They touch upon all the great departments of his literary activity; they are critical, biographical, historical, social and political. Unquestionably the loss would be enormous if *Sartor* and the *French Revolution* and *Frederick* were gone, but all the characteristic dogmas and beliefs would still be found expressed in one or other of the essays. Thus, one of the greatest of Carlyle's services was his mediation between the mind of

Germany and the mind of England. Now the essays alone would make Carlyle the chief mediator. For the first eight years of his career as author his themes are nearly all German. His translation of *Wilhelm Meister* is followed by a *Life of Schiller* and *German Romance;* and for the first five years of the *Miscellanies* nearly three-quarters of the subjects dealt with are German. The name of Goethe appears again and again, as is natural, seeing that to him Carlyle owed his spiritual re-birth. He criticises Schiller, whose life he had written. He discusses German literature at large, early and late and through its whole course. Twice he deals with Richter. But perhaps the most notable though certainly not the greatest name upon his list is that of Novalis—notable because Novalis is a mystic of the mystics, and it is just mysticism and the things akin to mysticism that Carlyle finds to discriminate Germany from England. The Germans (in those days) actually *believed* in a "light that never was on sea or land." In England, a poet might *say* such things, but if he *believed* in them England thought the worse of him. And so Wordsworth was left for many a long year to think as highly as he liked, and to live as plainly as the physical needs of humanity would let him. The important things were Steam Engines, and blessed was he who had many of them. It was the Age of Machinery, and the greatest of all machines was the Machine of Society.

When Carlyle used these phrases and poured ridicule upon them in *Signs of the Times*—an essay of this period,—he was applying the principles he had learnt from Germany. Indeed all the essays of the period, even those which are not German in subject, are saturated with these principles. So, for that matter, are the works of Carlyle's whole life. He is applying them when in the essay on Burns he shows how unsatisfactory in the spiritual sphere is the law of supply and demand. That law finds a place for a gauger of beer-barrels, but not

for a singer of divine songs. He is applying them again when he insists that it was not external circumstances that ruined Burns, that external circumstances never can ruin a man, that the spiritual is greater than the material, good stronger than evil. A kindred doctrine drawn from the same source is that of the supreme importance of the silent forces. It recurs again and again, but perhaps it is nowhere more beautifully expressed than in *Voltaire*, another of the non-German essays of those earlier years:—

"Truly it is a mortifying thing for your Conqueror to reflect, how perishable is the metal which he hammers with such violence: how the kind earth will soon shroud-up his bloody footprints; and all that he achieved and skilfully piled together will be but like his own 'canvas city' of a camp,—this evening loud with life, to-morrow all struck and vanished, 'a few earth-pits and heaps of straw!' For here, as always, it continues true, that the deepest force is the stillest; that, as in the Fable, the mild shining of the sun shall silently accomplish what the fierce blustering of the tempest has in vain essayed. Above all, it is ever to be kept in mind, that not by material, but by moral power, are men and their actions governed. How noiseless is thought! No rolling of drums, no tramp of squadrons, or immeasurable tumult of baggage-wagons, attend its movements: in what obscure and sequestered places may the head be meditating, which is one day to be crowned with more than imperial authority; for Kings and Emperors will be among its ministering servants; it will rule not over, but *in*, all heads, and with these its solitary combinations of ideas, as with magic formulas, bend the world to its will! The time may come, when Napoleon himself may be better known for his laws than for his battles; and the victory of Waterloo prove less momentous than the opening of the first Mechanics' Institute."

Perhaps the most striking illustration of the truth of this

meditation upon the measureless power of thought is to be found in a remark of the greatest living Danish critic. Speaking of his country and countrymen, he points out that small and poor as Denmark is, she can nevertheless boast a few sons whom not Denmark only but the whole world has agreed to rank among the great. And yet, he goes on, the Dane who counts for most to the world, he upon whom most thought is spent, who is most widely known, is not Tycho Brahe or Thorwaldsen, or any other man who was ever born in Denmark, but a Dane who never lived at all—Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, the creature of the brain of William Shakespeare. And so airy nothing may be more real and more important than the most solid substance. The poet and dreamer builds more firmly and more enduringly than the man of action.

If to be a philosopher means to be the disciple or apostle of a complete system of thought, then Carlyle was no philosopher. On the contrary, in *Characteristics* he pronounces metaphysics to be a "chronic malady," just as if he were the upholder of the commonest common sense, and ready, like Dr. Johnson, to demolish wire-drawn subtleties with the *argumentum ad baculum.* But, on the other hand, in *The State of German Literature* we see him at one with the Germans in the contention that this common sense affords no basis for ultimate belief at all. Good enough, in most cases, as a practical guide, it is useless for the discovery of truth. Common sense tells us that the sun goes round the earth, and yet in this matter nobody believes common sense. The business of the thinker is just to sift these universal persuasions, and distinguish between the sound and the unsound among them. Now in this sense, in the sense that he has adopted from philosophy great wide-reaching principles and that he applies them always and in every sphere, Carlyle was not only a philosopher, but the most effective philosopher of his time. His whole literary life was one long warfare against popular

opinion, and his weapons in the struggle were drawn from the armoury of German philosophy. From this he derived his scorn of the "Machine of Society," this revealed to him the limits of the law of supply and demand. His measureless contempt of the "mud philosophy" springs from his underlying idealism. The popular mind of England thought that there was one thing certain, matter, because a man might dash his foot or break his head against it; all other things were more or less doubtful. Carlyle, as the passage already quoted shows, was far more certain of thought and of force. Not a brick in London but thought had made it; not a leaf rotting on the highway but force enabled it to rot. The popular mind of England was convinced that the age of miracles was past. No, said Carlyle, "the age of miracles, as it ever was, now is." Popular conceptions of a negative sort had recently produced terrible convulsions in France. These popular conceptions had been drawn from the armoury of another philosophy deriving ultimately from the English. That philosophy had inferred from the premise that all things change the conclusion that there is no such thing as permanence. Carlyle's answer in *Diderot* is an excellent example of his manner:—

"Diderot has convinced himself, and indeed, as above became plain enough, acts on the conviction, that Marriage, contract it, solemnise it in what way you will, involves a solecism which reduces the amount of it to simple zero. It is a suicidal covenant; annuls itself in the very forming. 'Thou makest a vow,' says he, twice or thrice, as if the argument were a clincher, 'thou makest a vow of eternal constancy under a rock, which is even then crumbling away.' True, O Denis! the rock crumbles away: all things are changing; man changes faster than most of them. That, in the mean while, an Unchangeable lies under all this, and looks forth, solemn and benign, through the whole destiny

and working of man, is another truth; which no Mechanical Philosophe, in the dust of his logic-mill, can be expected to grind-out for himself. Man changes, and will change: the question then arises, Is it wise in him to tumble forth, in headlong obedience to his love of change; is it so much as possible for him? Among the dualisms of man's wholly dualistic nature, this we might fancy was an observable one: that along with his unceasing tendency to change, there is a no less ineradicable tendency to persevere. Were man only here to change, let him, far from marrying, cease even to hedge-in fields, and plough them; before the autumn season, he may have lost the whim of reaping them. Let him return to the nomadic state, and set his house on wheels; nay there too a certain restraint must curb his love of change, or his cattle will perish by incessant driving, without grazing in the intervals. O Denis! what things thou babblest, in thy sleep! How, in this world of perpetual flux, shall man secure himself the smallest foundation, except hereby alone: that he take preassurance of his Fate; that in this and the other high act of his life, his Will, with all solemnity, *abdicate* its right to change: voluntarily become involuntary, and say once for all, Be there then no farther dubitation on it!"

The same philosophy informs all Carlyle's work, critical, biographical, historical. It was by the application of principles that he so profoundly influenced criticism; for, though his influence has sometimes been exaggerated, it *was* profound. The defect of English criticism hitherto had been that much of it was the mere expression of unreasoned personal preference, while another great part was built up by the application to an author of canons whose validity he would not have acknowledged. These faults cannot be charged against all of Carlyle's predecessors. Lamb never approached an author except in the spirit of sympathy, and Coleridge and Hazlitt were critics who believed in the necessity of having

reasons for their conclusions. Still, no one else so clearly ennunciated and so consistently followed his principles as Carlyle. It was he who established the author's right to be judged in terms of what he attempted to do—with reservation, of course, of the critic's right to express his opinion as to whether the aim was worthy or not. If it was not, then pronounce sentence; but no sentence could be valid which did not take account of the aim. There was not even a chance, he declared, that a critic could be right unless he had seen the last and highest beauty of the author he criticised. In relation to all foreigners, and to his own countrymen who were not contemporaries, Carlyle was unswervingly faithful to his own principles. It was not only Goethe and Richter whom he judged justly and generously. To do so in their case was easy, because he was already sympathetic. But we find the same justice, the same fidelity to the rule that the critic must understand the point of view of his subject, in the essays on Diderot and Voltaire, whose principles he rejected. So too the essays on Burns and on Boswell's *Johnson* are admirable because they are profoundly sympathetic. If we contrast Macaulay on Boswell we see the importance of this. Macaulay dismisses the matter lightly and easily. Boswell was a prying fool, and by a strange chance his folly helped him to write the greatest book of the kind ever penned. Carlyle is not so easily satisfied. He sees and acknowledges the elements of folly; but there is the book, to him conclusive proof of the presence of something widely different from folly. His Boswell is a compound of highest and lowest, a man whose hero-worship itself is no mean thing, but on the contrary a very noble thing.

In relation to contemporary fellow-countrymen, however, it must be confessed that Carlyle does show weakness and is false to his own principles. The essay on Scott remains a blot upon his name, and his ill-natured strictures on Lamb

and other contemporaries in the *Reminiscences* and in letters and journals show that Scott's case was not solitary. It is a painful conclusion to come to, but it would seem that there was a certain jealousy, wholly unworthy of so great a man, in Carlyle's nature. It is significant that perhaps the only thoroughly generous criticism of a contemporary Englishman deals with one who could in no sense be a rival—Ebenezer Elliott. The Corn-Law Rhymer is praised, not extravagantly, but whole-heartedly.

Among the other essays, the disquisitions on history and biography would be interesting were it only because they present the views of so great a master of both arts. But it is not the essay on biography alone that illustrates his unwavering contention that "history is the essence of innumerable biographies." That conviction is embodied in nearly every one of the essays. He conceives that he has done nothing until he has revealed the man. Johnson and his Boswell, Burns, Goethe, Richter, Mirabeau,—one and all are men. This is the great charm of the essays. In hands like Carlyle's history can never be dry, for it is living. No one had a keener appreciation of the value of facts; but neither did any one more heartily despise the man who thought the facts were all. Dryasdust was but a poor creature in his eyes, for he had forgotten an indispensable point—to relate the fact to life. To Carlyle the most trivial fact about Johnson or about Mirabeau had an importance, but not in itself. The one threw light upon Johnson, and through him on the spiritual condition—the inner reality—of England in the eighteenth century. The other fact threw light upon the tremendous convulsion the history of which he was writing. Further, even the men themselves were of importance to him, mainly if not wholly for what their lives could teach his own time. Wherever he might turn for a subject, Carlyle always had one eye upon his own country and his own time. He wrote *Frederick*

because he foresaw the rise of Germany to the first position in Europe, and judged therefore that its past was not a dead past. This interest in the present comes to the surface in many of the essays. It is shown in a fashion peculiarly Carlylean in *Signs of the Times* and in *Characteristics;* in a way more commonplace in *Shooting Niagara;* and less wisely in *The Nigger Question*. *Chartism*, again, is either a very long essay or a short treatise on contemporary social problems; and *Latter-Day Pamphlets* is a group of essays on the same class of problems. They are somewhat turbid, yet essentially wise. At the distance of sixty years we can see that, generally speaking, in respect of the great points Carlyle was right. He rightly diagnosed the diseases of society, and though he had no cure to offer, it was still a great service to point out the nature of the ill. Some of the diseases have been cured; others, we may hope, are in process of cure; with respect to yet others progress has perhaps been more doubtful. It remains as true now as it was when he wrote it that the problem of problems is the organisation of labour. Much organising has been done, but we are still far from the goal Carlyle had in view.

Macaulay says that he had a premonition, before he learnt German, that the end for which he "was sent into this vale of tears was to make game of certain Germans." The statement, though playful, is illuminating. No two contemporaries could well stand in sharper and completer contrast than the apostle of 'Germanism' and the great contemporary who, though his junior by five years, had won fame when Carlyle was known only as an obscure translator from the German. Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–1859) for all practical purposes made his entry into literature in 1825, when the essay on Milton, the earliest of the famous *Critical and Historical Essays*, appeared in *The Edinburgh Review*. The suddenness of the author's rise to fame is a common-

place of literary history. Christopher North compared him to "a burnished fly in pride of May," bursting suddenly upon the sight. Here was a new star in the firmament; and, at a time when the old leaders in literature were rapidly passing away, many thought that it was destined to become the most brilliant of all. The fame thus early won was never eclipsed. Macaulay moved from success to success, in a career which never suffered a reverse and hardly even a check, until he died Baron Macaulay of Rothley.

As essayist, Macaulay is represented by his contributions to *The Edinburgh Review* from 1825 to 1844, and to these must be added the biographies written for the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, which stretch from 1853 to the year of his death. Thus they afford specimens alike of his early, his intermediate and his mature styles, and they deal with the whole range of subjects, critical, biographical, historical, philosophical, he was capable of writing about. They are all unmistakably the product of one mind; but a notable development can be traced between the beginning and the end. When the printing of the essays in the United States compelled him in self-defence to gather his contributions together, Macaulay's own taste pronounced upon his *Milton* a condemnation as severe as the harshest critic could desire. It contains "scarcely a paragraph such as his matured judgment approves," it is "overloaded with gaudy and ungraceful ornament." If we turn to the last and longest of the biographical essays, *William Pitt*, we can measure the extent of the difference; and it is great. n the latter essay there is no "gaudy and ungraceful ornaent." It is a masterly narrative, for the most part as adirable in its restraint as in its lucidity. Occasionally there a flash of the old hyperbole, as when he is speaking of the e of Pitt by his Cambridge tutor Pretyman, "which enjoys distinction of being the worst biographical work for its in the world." But usually a surprising judgment is

given under reserve. "It may be doubted," he says of Pitt, "whether any scholar has ever, at twenty, had a more solid and profound knowledge of the two great tongues of the old civilised world." Thirty years earlier there would have been no doubt at all about it. But though there is real development there is no fundamental difference; there is no such difference as that, for example, which separates Carlyle's *Life of Schiller* from his *Sartor Resartus*. It is a development along the lines laid down in the first essay.

Macaulay as critic has since his death been generally depreciated; and indeed he neither was nor conceived himself to be great in this sphere. "I am nothing," he says, "if not historical." But nothing in the language of Macaulay may be something considerable in the estimation of smaller men. That immense knowledge of literature could not be wholly ineffectual when turned upon a literary subject. The wealth of illustration would alone be valuable, and it remains valuable however much we may disagree with the judgment it is meant to reinforce. The truth is, Macaulay rarely even attempted to be critical. The majority of his essays speedily dismiss the books which serve them for pegs, and branch off into historical disquisition. But when he did choose to play the critic, he showed a mastery of the art as it was understood by the school of Jeffrey, which is unequalled by any member of that school. The paper on Montgomery is merciless; but of the attacks on Coleridge and Keats and Wordsworth, which is comparable to it in effectiveness? Macaulay is in two points decisively superior to his rivals here: in the matter of his criticism he is right and they are wrong; and he has written with far more vivacity and real force—not violence. Destructive criticism, however, is never great, though it may be amusing. But neither is Macaulay wanting on the constructive side. There is much that is true and helpful in what he says about Dryden, about Temple, about Addison, and about

the eighteenth-century writers generally. Where he is really weak is in his general principles, when he enunciates them. Unlike Carlyle he contributed none of the slightest value. Sometimes he is almost ludicrously wrong. "Our judgment ripens; our imagination decays," he tells us; and the examples with which he supports the assertion are those of *Ossian* and *Robinson Crusoe*. The young reader, he explains, likes, but is unable to appreciate the latter; he probably thinks it not half so fine as Macpherson's rant. The mature man despises Macpherson, and he admires the skill of Defoe, but is no longer greatly interested in his story. Against the inference that imagination decays early is the staggering fact that Shakespeare was about forty-six when he wrote *The Tempest*, and Milton was nearly sixty when *Paradise Lost* was published. The ethical paradox of the essay on Machiavelli, and the literary paradox about Boswell are other cases in point. But the most conclusive proof of Macaulay's poverty in the matter of general principles is to be found in the essay on Bacon, with its panegyric on the philosophy of fruit, and its utterly unsound contrast between Aristotle and Bacon. Here again he is far better as critic than as philosopher: the analysis of Bacon's style is admirable.

We must recur to Macaulay's own judgment on himself: "I am nothing if not historical"; and wherever we open his works we see evidence of its truth. Except *Montgomery*, there is hardly an essay that is not historical in essence; the speeches are historical; the *Lays* are historical. Thirty years ago the young lions of various periodicals thought they had demolished Macaulay the historian as well as Macaulay the poet—if indeed they condescended to notice the latter. But older lions were silent, or else they roared in another key. Freeman spoke most respectfully of Macaulay's command of facts; and in later days Lord Acton, who did not like the man, spoke with astonishing warmth of the historian. Macaulay had pre-

judices and he fell into mistakes; and the prejudices were strong and some of the mistakes were serious. There is abundant evidence of both in the essays. In these days when there are few Whigs left, we can easily pull to pieces the gospel according to the apostle of the Whigs. Indian history, as it is presented in the essay on Warren Hastings, has had to be re-written. But when the fullest allowance for defects is made there remains an immense amount that is highly valuable. If *Warren Hastings* is superseded as history, it is still among the most spirited pieces of English prose, and the pictures of Chatham, of William Pitt, and of Madame d'Arblay and the society in which she lived are excellent.

The style of Macaulay has been criticised again and again as metallic. And the criticism is just—that is its defect. But criticism which stops short at defects is bad criticism; and so is criticism which demands of a man that which he did not try to give, or what, from his nature, he could not give. Now Macaulay had certain well-defined limits. His was not the still small voice, but a voice rather loud and insistent. He was compelling rather than persuasive, argumentative, not insinuating. He addressed himself almost exclusively to the understanding. In consequence there are no dim vistas in his writings; no man could be less of a mystic than he. His habit of mind was so positive that there could be no such thing as light and shade in his style. We know then what we need not look for in such a man; but the facts ought to convince us that there is something for which we ought to look. If we do not find it we are probably at fault. All that immense reputation had a cause behind it. Jeffrey would not have lost his head over Macaulay's style if there had not been great merit in the style. And in truth there is great merit. It is energetic, vivid, picturesque It has a boundless fertility of illustration. There is no style more rousing. The reader of Macaulay may be stirred to active opposition, the one

thing that is hardly possible is that he should be left indifferent. Examples in the essays are numerous—the picture of the Black Hole of Calcutta, or that of the trial of Warren Hastings, or the passage on the Catholic Church which closes with the traveller from New Zealand sketching the ruins of St. Paul. It is vain to deny to the author of passages such as these the title of a great master of English prose. It is ungrateful to ignore the immense service he has done in stirring the minds of generation after generation of boys and young men, and teaching them, as it has been truly said he did, more about the history of their country than anybody else has ever succeeded in teaching them.

(What we do not find in Macaulay—that the absence of which denies him a place among the essayists in the more esoteric meaning of the word, is intimacy of personal confidence.) In a sense every line he wrote is instinct with his personality. The likes and dislikes, the certitudes and the rare incertitudes, are all Macaulay's. But they all come from what Carlyle called the argumentative region; and that, as we also learn from Carlyle, is merely the outer covering. We know from his writings how Macaulay argued and what opinions he held, but we know very little of how he felt. The biography shows a man of the warmest domestic affections; the writings show rather a man of strong dislikes and confident opinions, but suggest that he was somewhat cold of heart. (He is merely, then, *qua* essayist, the essayist-historian. We have the writer, but not the man.)

When we pass from the two great Early Victorians to their successors who were destined to reign in the middle of the period, there is a distinct decline in the quality alike of the essays and of the histories. James Anthony Froude (1818–1894) had, it is true, the gift of style, and his limpid English is always delightful to read, but when (*Short Studies of Great Subjects*, by reason of which he has a place among the

essayists, is put beside the *Miscellanies* of Carlyle, it is clear how immense is the inferiority in depth, in originality, in the qualities that are most profoundly human.) Though Froude was a disciple of Carlyle, there was little real affinity between the minds of the two men. Froude had been dominated by the stronger character, but he came to wear the fetters of discipleship uneasily, and probably his strange treatment of the memory of his master was due to reaction.

Froude's personal history has left a deep mark on all his writings, and for that reason it is necessary to refer to it. He began his literary career by writing for Newman's *Lives of the Saints;* but in his case, as in the case of several others, Newman's final influence was towards scepticism. Froude could not believe the silly fables he found in his authorities. He had been destined for the Church, and went so far as to be ordained deacon. But doubts gathered thick about him, and there he stopped. The publication of his *Nemesis of Faith* in 1849 caused a tremendous outcry, which forced him to resign his fellowship and drove him from Oxford. It also brought about a breach with his father, who stopped his allowance. He was now dependent upon his pen, and a time of stress and difficulty followed. Gradually he made his way, writing to various periodicals, in particular *The Westminster Review* and *Fraser's Magazine.* With the latter his connection was particularly intimate, and in 1861 he succeeded Parker as its editor.

The influence of Froude's life is to be seen in the predominance of theological and ecclesiastical subjects and interests among his works. The *History of England* itself is an illustration, for his main object in writing it was to illustrate the Protestant Reformation. But the *Short Studies* also amply illustrate the point. In 1850 he who, only a few years before, had been contributing to *The Lives of the Saints,* wrote a critique of that compilation.' Many years later he

criticised his former chief, Newman himself, in an article on *A Grammar of Assent.* Close association with the Newmanites had produced a profound distrust of their methods and serious doubt of their intellectual sincerity. There are among the *Short Studies* many other indications of interest in ecclesiastical and theological questions. Froude writes about the book of Job and gives a lecture on Calvinism and a series of lectures on Erasmus and Luther. He has a paper on *The Philosophy of Catholicism*, and discusses *The Condition and Prospects of Protestantism* on the one hand and *The Revival of Romanism* on the other; and it was almost inevitable that a man who had passed through his experiences should, sooner or later, discuss *The Oxford Counter-Reformation.* Soon after the ecclesiastical world had been shaken by *Essays and Reviews* he enters *A Plea for the Discussion of Theological Difficulties*, and himself discusses *Criticism and the Gospel History*. This interest indeed amounts almost to an obsession. Though Froude divested himself of his orders as soon as the law allowed him to do so, it was totally beyond his power to divest himself of the atmosphere created for him by his university and his family—for the Tractarian Hurrell Froude was his elder brother, and his father was a High Churchman, so bigoted that he would not suffer a copy of *The Pilgrim's Progress* to enter his house.

In work of this sort Froude's weakness in philosophy tells heavily against him. He had read Carlyle at Oxford, and soon after he left the university he came to know the man himself; and the books and the man combined turned him to the great thinkers of Germany. But his knowledge of them was superficial, they never penetrated his blood and his bones. *The Life of Carlyle*, though it is one of the most readable of books, proves how little he understood his master, and how imperfectly he comprehended Carlyle's spirit. Froude was at his best where no demand for original thought

the subject-matter allows. Man is somewhat intractable to science. The calipers have not yet been forged to take his measure, nor the formulæ devised that will express his relation to the universe. The Oxford school, however, had boundless belief in the power of research and utterly distrusted imagination. Freeman was one of its most distinguished members, and under its influence he wrote his essays. It is not surprising that as literature they are of no value. They are long, formless and dreary. It is a necessary consequence of the very theory on which they are based that they pass away as soon as their results are woven into the fabric of knowledge. The science of last year is out of date this year. Freeman is already antiquated; but Tacitus remains for ever, and that not merely because he is, for us, an original authority who can never be superseded. He would remain just the same if every fact he records were guaranteed by some other and unquestionable authority.

entitled *Last Leaves*, containing a selection from Smith's contributions to magazines, several of which—in particular *An Essay on an Old Subject* and *On Dreams and Dreaming*—were quite worthy of the author of *Dreamthorp*. But time has proved that the friendly critics were mistaken, at least as to the reputation Smith was to enjoy. There always have been some readers who have recognised the excellence, here and there supreme, of Smith's essays; but such readers have been few, and there neither is nor ever has been any indication that he would take his place in the general estimation as an essayist inferior only to the greatest masters. Yet that place is his by right. Though *Dreamthorp* is a small volume and the essays are only twelve in number, the range is wide. The quotations from Smith in the introduction to this volume show that he understood as well as any man ever did the essentials of his craft as essayist. The pleasant chat about the literary and artistic temperament in *Men of Letters* and the easy gossip of *A Shelf in my Bookcase* illustrate other phases of critical ability. Art is joined with nature in *Books and Gardens*, and *Vagabonds* shows no less interest in that sort of nature which we qualify with the adjective human. The poet peeps out in the wealth of metaphor and illustration. There are numerous phrases so striking as to drive home the thought they illustrate. For example: "To denude death of its terrible associations were a vain attempt. The atmosphere is always cold round an iceberg." The whole of the essay *Of Death and Dying* illustrates the truth of Smith's saying elsewhere, that "the world is not so much in need of new thoughts as that when thought grows old and worn with usage it should, like current coin, be called in, and, from the mint of genius, reissued fresh and new." Throughout *Of Death and Dying* Smith has that sort of originality, and it is just the sort which is proper to the essay. Many of the thoughts are trite enough, as are Montaigne's too, but they are re-minted

with the stamp of genius. So it is again in the essay *On the Importance of a Man to Himself.* "You cannot define the individual." We all know this: it is a truth too familiar to be very impressive; yet Smith contrives to express it freshly: "The globe has been circumnavigated, but no man ever has; you may survey a kingdom and note the result in maps, but all the *savants* in the world could not produce a reliable map of the poorest human personality."

The gems of the collection, however, are the title-essay *Dreamthorp* and *A Lark's Flight.* The former gives a charming description, or rather impression, of the village of which the writer has become a denizen. We see the moss on the walls, hear the jackdaws chattering in the ruined castle, feel and share in an idleness which may have more meaning than bustle has. "Here I play with my own thoughts, here I ripen for the grave." Tennyson himself has hardly depicted more beautifully a "haunt of ancient peace." The theme of *A Lark's Flight* is not very promising. Men do not think with pleasure on death by public execution and its effect on the spectator—for, of course, when the essay was written the thing was still a public show. But the incident of the lark's flight is superb. In the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth* Shakespeare has imagined an incident comparable to it. Here nature provides the incident, and Alexander Smith describes and interprets it in a fashion that even Shakespeare need not have disdained:—

"Whether the authorities were apprehensive that a rescue would be attempted, or were anxious merely to strike terror into the hundreds of wild Irishry engaged on the railway, I cannot say; in any case, there was a display of military force quite unusual. The carriage in which the criminals—Catholics both—and their attendant priests were seated, was *guarded by soldiers with fixed bayonets; indeed, the whole* regiment then lying in the city was massed in front and

behind, with a cold, frightful glitter of steel. Besides the foot soldiers, there were dragoons, and two pieces of cannon; a whole little army, in fact. With a slenderer force battles have been won which have left a mark in history. What did the prisoners think of their strange importance, and of the tramp and hurly-burly all around? When the procession moved out of the city, it seemed to draw with it almost the entire population; and when once the country roads were reached, the crowd spread over the fields on either side, ruthlessly treading down the tender wheat braird. I got a glimpse of the doomed, blanched faces which had haunted me so long, at the turn of the road, where, for the first time, the black cross-beam with its empty halters became visible to them. Both turned and regarded it with a long, steady look; that done, they again bent their heads attentively to the words of the clergyman. I suppose in that long, eager, fascinated gaze, they practically *died*—that for them death had no additional bitterness. When the mound was reached on which the scaffold stood, there was immense confusion. Around it a wide space was kept clear by the military; the cannon were placed in position; out flashed the swords of the dragoons; beneath and around on every side was the crowd. Between two brass helmets I could see the scaffold clearly enough, and when in a little while the men, bareheaded and with their attendants, appeared upon it, the surging crowd became stiffened with fear and awe. And now it was that the incident so simple, so natural, and yet so frightful in its tragic suggestions, took place. Be it remembered that the season was early May, that the day was fine, that the wheat-fields were clothing themselves in the green of the young crop, and that around the scaffold, standing on a sunny mound, a wide space was kept clear. When the men appeared beneath the beam, each under his proper halter, there was a dead silence, —every one gazing too intently to whisper to his neighbour

even. Just then, out of the grassy space at the foot of the scaffold, in the dead silence audible to all, a lark rose from its happy nest, and went singing upward in its happy flight. O heaven! how did that song translate itself into dying ears? Did it bring in one wild burning moment father, and mother, and poor Irish cabin, and prayers said at bed-time, and the smell of turf fires, and innocent sweethearting, and rising and setting suns? Did it—but the dragoon's horse has become restive, and his brass helmet bobs up and down, and blots everything; and there is a sharp sound, and I feel the great crowd heave and swing, and hear it torn by a sharp shiver of pity, and the men whom I saw so near but a moment ago are at immeasurable distance, and have solved the great enigma, —and the lark has not yet finished his flight: you can see and hear him yonder in the fringe of a white May cloud."

Smith seems already to belong to the distant past, for he died at thirty-eight, while Skelton's longer life causes him, though he was only two years younger, to appear a man of yesterday. From *Nugæ Criticæ,* a volume of essays collected from various magazines and published in 1862, down to *The Table-Talk of Shirley*, which appeared shortly before his death, the name of Skelton, or rather the pseudonym Shirley, was among the most familiar to the readers of the day. He was gifted with a style so good that it won the admiration of all the greatest masters and the best judges. He was learned enough to be instructive and humorous enough to be amusing. He touched literature, and life, and nature, and all with skill. The odour of russia clings to many of his pages, the air of the heather and of the sea hangs about others; for he had a keen feeling for nature, and a happy knack of imparting his own sentiment. Sometimes in the *Table-Talk* the style is just a little too chatty, but in an essayist the fault is less than the vice of stiffness would be.

A. K. H. Boyd was likewise an essayist by nature. The

Recreations of a Country Parson and the *Graver Thoughts of a Country Parson* show much ingenuity and versatility of mind. The best of the papers have the character of pleasant chat; their weakness is that they betray at times a certain pettiness of mind, and also a remarkable want of self-knowledge. If we may judge from a passage in *The Moral Influence of Dwellings*, no author ever more seriously misunderstood himself than Boyd. "If there be a thing which I detest," he says, "it is a diffuse and rambling style. Let any writer always treat his subject in a manner terse and severely logical. My own model is Tacitus, and the earlier writings of Bacon. Let a man say in a straight-forward way what he has got to say; and the more briefly the better." There could be nothing much less like Tacitus and Bacon than these essays. It is not that the words employed are too many, but the things treated are so often trivial. Compare the famous essay *Of Studies*, every sentence a thought, and every thought falling with the weight of a sledge-hammer, with the questions which concern the country parson: "'Any one sick in the parish?' 'How was the church attended on the Sundays you were away?' How is Jenny, who had the fever; and John, who had the paralytic stroke? how is the horse; the cow; the pig; the dog; how is the garden progressing? how about fruit; how about flowers?" All this is legitimate enough, and the questions are put as directly and as briefly as Bacon himself could put them. But there is a world of difference between this sort of brevity and the tremendous sententiousness of the great Roman or the great Englishman. In suggesting such comparisons Boyd is his own worst enemy. In fairness to him we must forget what he would fain have been and take him as he was. Sometimes he is engagingly simple; occasionally it is difficult to determine whether he is simple or sly. Is it simplicity or slyness when he writes of Norman Macleod that "he was a great jolly Christian Bohemian,

using the most unconventional language freely in his talk, sitting with the Prince of Wales in the smoking-room at Dunrobin Castle till half-past three in the morning, *yet*[1] never sinking below the highest level of the respect of even such as knew him most familiarly?"

Robert Louis Stevenson stands on a very much higher plane. Since Lamb there has been no more accomplished essayist than he. Nature made him an essayist, and he co-operated with nature, developing and strengthening the gifts with which he was endowed at birth. The training he gave himself, if it were generally followed, would probably in nine cases out of ten produce literary prigs of the most insufferable sort. There is wisdom as well as wit in Lewis Carroll's rendering of the popular proverb, "take care of the sense and the sounds will take care of themselves." Some at least of the greatest stylists have followed it. Froude was impatient when he was questioned about his style, and gave the querist to understand that he said what he wanted to say, and there was no more secret about it. Matthew Arnold was of precisely the same opinion. "People think that I can teach them style," he said to Mr. G. W. E. Russell. "What stuff it all is! Have something to say, and say it as clearly as you can. That is the only secret of style." But Stevenson systematically and laboriously studied the sounds. Fortunately he did not make himself a prig, for he had none of the elements of priggishness to begin with; while the habit of looking upon everything, even the most trivial scene or event in street or in country, as material for literature, fostered the spirit of the essayist. For, by the nature of the case, the essayist is the man who knows how to make use of small things. A stately Gibbon needs a stately Rome for theme. But Rome, because of its very greatness, is of small use to the essayist. Only now and then can he deal with a

[1] The italics are mine.

stately theme directly; and yet, on the other hand, he has to remember that every road leads to Rome. The small things that remain small count for nothing in literature. The skill of the essayist lies in showing, or rather in hinting, how the village path leads to Rome. Of this skill Stevenson was master. There is an excellent illustration in *An Inland Voyage*, a book which, like *Travels with a Donkey*, is essentially a collection of essays wrought into a whole. The passage in question is the conclusion of *La Fère of cursed Memory*. The pretty domestic scene of the Bazins and the effect of it and of their politeness on the spirits of the hurt and sore travellers are matters simple and even trivial in themselves, yet suggestive of far-reaching reflections :—

"Little did the Bazins know how much they served us. We were charged for candles, for food and drink, and for the beds we slept in. But there was nothing in the bill for the husband's pleasant talk; nor for the pretty spectacle of their married life. And there was yet another item uncharged. For these people's politeness really set us up again in our own esteem. We had a thirst for consideration; the sense of insult was still hot in our spirits; and civil usage seemed to restore us to our position in the world.

"How little we pay our way in life! Although we have our purses continually in our hand the better part of service goes still unrewarded. But I like to fancy that a grateful spirit gives as good as it gets. Perhaps the Bazins knew how much I liked them? perhaps, they also, were healed of some slights by the thanks that I gave them in my manner?"

There is nothing more characteristic of Stevenson as essayist than, in the first place, the intimacy of this passage, and, in the second place, its moralising tone. Everywhere we get personal experiences—in *The Amateur Emigrant*, in *Memories and Portraits*, in *Random Memories*, in *Fontainebleau*. The writer himself is very frequently in the fore-

ground, he is never far in the background. He gives delightful confidences, far more intimate than a mere record of events. We get charming glimpses of his childhood and youth. What a light is thrown upon boyhood by *The Lantern-Bearers*—a light mental, not physical, for "it was the rule to keep our glory contained, none could recognise a lantern-bearer, unless (like the polecat) by the smell." *Some College Memories* and *A College Magazine* are equally frank about a somewhat later stage. *The Education of an Engineer* also draws the curtain from off youthful literary ambitions, and we learn how *Voces Fidelium* remains unwritten, because the moths flew in and burned themselves in the poet's midnight candle.

All these essays and many more are based upon events in the writer's life. But it is equally characteristic of Stevenson that the event is rarely sufficient in itself. Story-teller as he was, he was still more a moralist. Henley's "something of the Shorter Catechist" is an under-statement. There was not merely something but a great deal of the Shorter Catechist in Stevenson; fundamentally, if we take the phrase in a generous sense, there was little else. He quotes with approval Shairp's saying that Burns would have been no Scotsman if he had not loved to moralise; and, for himself, though he was far from accepting in all points the common view of morals, a view of morals that he did accept lies at the root of nearly everything he wrote. His purpose in *The Dynamiter* was to make crime ridiculous; and he and his wife prefixed to it a noble dedication to two police-officers, because they held that honour should be paid to those who fight crime at the risk of their own lives. In *The Foreigner at Home* he seizes upon the opening question of the two national catechisms as the best illustration of the difference in environment between the Scot and the Englishman:—

"About the very cradle of the Scot there goes a hum of

metaphysical divinity; and the whole of two divergent systems is summed up, not merely speciously, in the two first questions of the rival catechisms, the English tritely inquiring, 'What is your name?' the Scottish striking at the very roots of life with, 'What is the chief end of man?' and answering nobly, if obscurely, 'To glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever.'"

This "hum of metaphysics" is about Stevenson always. Concrete as his mind was, it was also speculative, and the speculation finds expression sometimes in the most unexpected places. *The Character of Dogs*—a race of creatures that Stevenson, like his countrymen Scott and John Brown, handles with remarkable skill and sympathy—opens out into meditations of no narrow range, and shows the writer by no means convinced of the universal truth of Bacon's saying that man is the dog's deity. Generally, however, Stevenson's philosophy limits itself to man, and in the great majority of cases it is ethical in its nature. Thus the lantern-bearers, who are absurd enough in their action if the imagination behind it be left out, become the text for a discussion of the philosophy of literature, which leads to a decisive rejection of that realism which was dominant before *Treasure Island*. There is a "haunting and truly spectral unreality" in realistic books, because they miss the joy of life, "the personal poetry, the enchanted atmosphere, that rainbow work of fancy that clothes what is naked and seems to ennoble what is base." More purely ethical is *Old Mortality*, and, above all, the magnificent *Christmas Sermon*, one of the finest of modern essays, rich in wisdom, noble in feeling, transparent in sincerity:—

"*Here lies one who meant well, tried a little, failed much*:—surely that may be his epitaph, of which he need not be ashamed. Nor will he complain at the summons which calls a defeated soldier from the field: defeated, ay, if he were Paul

or Marcus Aurelius!—but if there is still one inch of fight in his old spirit, undishonoured. The faith which sustained him in his life-long blindness and life-long disappointment will scarce even be required in this last formality of laying down his arms. Give him a march with his old bones; there, out of the glorious sun-coloured earth, out of the day and the dust and the ecstasy—there goes another Faithful Failure!"

Profoundly ethical, then, Stevenson is; but it has to be repeated that the ethics are not precisely the ethics of Puritanism. In order to correct any tendency to think that they are we have only to turn to *A Gossip on a Novel of Dumas*. There we see the Shorter Catechist "translated" almost as effectually as Bottom; but there, at the same time, we find the most conclusive evidence that Stevenson is always a moralist:—

"There is no quite good book without a good morality; but the world is wide, and so are morals. Out of two people who have dipped into Sir Richard Burton's *Thousand and one Nights*, one shall have been offended by the animal details; another to whom these were harmless, perhaps even pleasing, shall yet have been shocked in his turn by the rascality and cruelty of all the characters. Of two readers, again, one shall have been pained by the morality of a religious memoir, one by that of the *Vicomte de Bragelonne*. And the point is that neither need be wrong. We shall always shock each other both in life and art; we cannot get the sun into our pictures, nor the abstract right (if there be such a thing) into our books; enough if, in the one, there glimmer some hint of the great light that blinds us from heaven; enough if, in the other, there shine, even upon foul details, a spirit of magnanimity."

The closing words are inspired by a love of the heroic, another Stevensonian quality which ought never to be forgotten. It is the essence of the *Christmas Sermon* as well, and we detect it in all his frequent meditations upon death—for example, those in *Ordered South* and in *Aes Triplex*. They are

a touching reminder of Stevenson's history. They take us into his confidence with respect to subjects which circumstance brought closer to him than to most men. They show him building up that philosophy which nerved him to make his life active at whatever risk of ending it. "It is better," he says, "to lose health like a spendthrift than to waste it like a miser. It is better to live and be done with it, than to die daily in the sick-room. By all means begin your folio; even if the doctor does not give you a year, even if he hesitates about a month, make one brave push and see what can be accomplished in a week." The same spirit inspires the saying in the title piece of the volume which contains these essays: "To avoid an occasion for our virtues is a worse degree of failure than to push forward pluckily and make a fall." And in the *Christmas Sermon* he insists that this was the principle of the morality of Christ himself: "*Thou shalt* was ever his word, with which he superseded *thou shalt not.*"

This is the philosophy of the invalid who is resolute not to sink to mere invalidism. It is the voice of a man who, forced to endure, is determined also to do. How gallantly Stevenson lived up to the spirit of his own philosophy is well known. If he had limited his admiration to heroism of this sort, such one-sidedness would have been easily pardonable. But he was far from doing so. No one more heartily admired the careless light-hearted heroism of the strong and active. All his romances proclaim that admiration, characters like Alan Breck are an embodiment of it. The essays manifest it too. Nowhere is there more of it than in *The English Admirals.* Stevenson had boundless admiration for Duncan, facing the whole Dutch fleet with his own flagship and only one other vessel, and saying to its captain, "I have taken the depth of the water, and when the *Venerable* goes down, my flag will still fly." He had written the story of the *Revenge* in prose before Tennyson published his great ballad on the same

story, and he estimates very highly the value of such exploits. Greenville chewing wine-glasses at table makes no very pleasant figure, he admits; "but his work of art, his finished tragedy, is an eloquent performance; and I contend it ought not only to enliven men of the sword as they go into battle, but send back merchant-clerks with more heart and spirit to their book-keeping by double entry." And with regard to another story of apparently needless sacrifice, he quotes Sir William Temple with approval: "Whether it be wise in men to do such actions or no, I am sure it is so in States to honour them." In short, heroism is something with a substantive value of its own. Though it may seem to be all sacrifice, and sometimes needless sacrifice, the heroic act cannot be confined within itself; it passes out to inspirit clerks and counter-jumpers.

This man then, though he was an artist in words who had deliberately trained himself from boyhood with the view to become such, was anything but a mere dilettante. It is fitting to recognise in the first place that he was emphatically a man. But the training was not in vain, the artistry in words was won; and it is fitting to recognise this too, in the second place. Stevenson is among those writers who have mastered their calling as a craft. Scott was one of the six authors [1] to whom he was able constantly to recur, and whose best works he could not read too often. But what he admired was the heroisms and "brave translunary things" that Scott's native genius suggested, not the carelessness and slovenly writing which mar many a page. He himself, with a far lower grade of native genius and a less catholic humanity, was an incomparably more conscientious craftsman. What he writes is easy to read because it has cost himself an infinity of labour—

[1] "One or two of Scott's novels, Shakespeare, Molière, Montaigne, *The Egoist*, and the *Vicomte de Bragelonne*, form the inner circle of my acquaintance."

not, perhaps, in the composition of the actual essay before us, but in the years of training before it could be composed. It is this long training which enables Stevenson to impart that easy gliding movement to *Fontainebleau*, with its pleasant picture of the society of artists in the forest and their singular inn, and to the excellent *Talk and Talkers*. From boyhood onwards Stevenson observed nature with a view to the description of scenes in words; and thus he was enabled to impart the sense of landscape to *Roads*, to *The Coast of Fife* and to many another essay. In this respect it may be doubted whether he has any equal. Sometimes a scene is painted in a sentence, as in the description of the little towns on the coast of Fife, "posted along the shore as close as sedges, each with its bit of harbour, its old weather-beaten church or public building, its flavour of decayed prosperity and decaying fish."

Some great writers produce a profound effect by their work as a whole, but are not readily quotable; others have the gift of condensing their meaning into a striking phrase. The conscious and deliberate literary artist will generally be found to belong to the latter class. Pope, for example, is the most quotable writer in English after Shakespeare. Stevenson stands intermediate. On the whole, he rather diffuses his meaning, and makes it an atmosphere enfolding everything; but at times his skill in words concentrates itself in a sentence or phrase, or even in a word. The skilled artist is seen in the witty description of the effect of marriage upon generosity: "Yesterday he would have shared his last shilling; to-day 'his first duty is to his family,' and is fulfilled in large measure by laying down vintages and husbanding the health of an invaluable parent." He is revealed in a sudden turn of expression, as in the same essay: "Man is a creature who lives not upon bread alone, but principally by catchwords." An unexpected phrase may produce an extraordinary effect. He is speaking of the light-hearted merriment of dwellers on the

slopes of a volcano: "It seems not credible that respectable married people, with umbrellas, should find appetite for a bit of supper within quite a long distance of a fiery mountain." Or again, take the description of the victor of Camperdown: "And you observe this is no naked Viking in a pre-historic period; but a Scotch member of Parliament, with a smattering of the classics, a telescope, a cocked hat of great size, and flannel underclothing."

While it is true that Stevenson is, as has already been said, eminent for his skill in conveying the effect of scenes of nature —perhaps, relatively to others, more eminent for that than for anything else,—it would be a mistake to suppose that this is for him the principal point of interest. The opposite is implied in what has been already said of him as a moralist. (His first interest is man. He found much in the country, but even more in the street. Like Scott, he loved nature, but above all nature associated with man.) The principal, though by no means the only charm of Fontainebleau is its society of painters. He sees Magus Muir with the eye of historical imagination, and the central figure is not even the wounded Archbishop, but the enigmatical Hackston of Rathillet. It is man that he is perpetually weighing in the balance, and man's estimate of himself that he often pronounces wrong. Thus he examines the views of age and youth, and finds no good reason for believing that all wisdom is embodied in the former. The old man praises Prudence, but does he fully believe his own praise? "If a man lives to any considerable age, it cannot be denied that he laments his imprudences, but I notice he often laments his youth a deal more bitterly and with a more genuine intonation" Herein he agrees with the author of that excellent story *David Harum*, who makes his hero lament the good times he did *not* give himself in his youth. Again, in *An Apology for Idlers* he weighs the gospel of work and finds it wanting. "Perpetual devotion to what a man

calls his business, is only to be sustained by perpetual neglect of many other things." "The true business of life is living, and living in the full sense is impossible if a man is for ever occupied with one thing in which his whole nature cannot find expression." "Many make a large fortune who remain pathetically stupid to the last. And meanwhile there goes the idler, who began life with them—by your leave, a different picture. He has had time to take care of his health and his spirits; he has been a great deal in the open air, which is the most salutary of all things for both body and mind; and if he has never read the great *Book* in very recondite places, he has dipped into it and skimmed it over to excellent purpose. Might not the student afford some Hebrew roots, and the business man some of his half-crowns, for a share of the idler's knowledge of life at large, and Art of Living?" If we probe below the surface we find that Stevenson's view is at bottom the wise old Greek view, that the end of business is leisure. For what he desires is not really idleness, but occupation congenial to his own nature. In this respect his life was all of a piece. No one, he tells us, more perseveringly played truant in boyhood and youth. But he did it, not in order to be unoccupied, but that he might be congenially busy.

It would be hard to conceive a man with the tastes of Stevenson and trained as Stevenson trained himself, who was not also a critic. Stevenson was a most accomplished one. In his letters as well as his essays we see the result of a life of thought about the principles of composition. As a critic, he is at once philosophical and intensely personal. He is at his best in papers like *A Gossip on Romance*, where the method is easy, informal and personal, and the principles are rather suggested than specifically stated; but from time to time he brings to the front one or other of the two convictions which underlie all his work—the conviction that truth of art is not identical with truth of fact, and the conviction that the first

of all duties and the greatest of all difficulties to the artist is to learn how to select. The former conviction set him in steadfast opposition to the realistic school and made him a romancer, the latter caused him to labour at shortening his books far more strenuously than others toil to spin them out. The former supplied him with a principle of division which served him in good stead many a time—as for example in his criticism of *Victor Hugo's Romances*: "If Shakespeare makes his ships cast anchor by some seaport of Bohemia, if Hugo imagines Tom-Tim-Jack to be a likely nickname for an English sailor, or if either Shakespeare, or Hugo, or Scott, for that matter, be guilty of 'figments enough to confuse the march of a whole history—anachronisms enough to overset all chronology,' the life of their creations, the artistic truth and accuracy of their work, is not so much as compromised. But when we come upon a passage like the sinking of the 'Ourque' in this romance,[1] we can do nothing but cover our face with our hands: the conscientious reader feels a sort of disgrace in the very reading. For such artistic falsehoods, springing from what I have called already an unprincipled avidity after effect, no amount of blame can be exaggerated; and above all, when the criminal is such a man as Victor Hugo."

With regard to the second conviction, his reward for the labour it entailed upon him is that his writings are among the least ephemeral of the time in which they were produced.

Of the essayists in the looser sense who still remain to be noticed the eldest was Sir Arthur Helps (1813-1875), whose *Friends in Council* seems arid enough to most readers now. The subjects dealt with are such as demand either the weight of a Bacon or the delicacy of a Lamb, and Helps had neither the one nor the other. Yet some of the greatest men of his time believed in him and praised him highly. Hawthorne, however, seems to have gauged him accurately. "A thin,

[1] *Les Travailleurs de la Mer.*

calls his business, is only to be sustained by perpetual neglect of many other things." "The true business of life is living, and living in the full sense is impossible if a man is for ever occupied with one thing in which his whole nature cannot find expression." "Many make a large fortune who remain pathetically stupid to the last. And meanwhile there goes the idler, who began life with them—by your leave, a different picture. He has had time to take care of his health and his spirits; he has been a great deal in the open air, which is the most salutary of all things for both body and mind; and if he has never read the great *Book* in very recondite places, he has dipped into it and skimmed it over to excellent purpose. Might not the student afford some Hebrew roots, and the business man some of his half-crowns, for a share of the idler's knowledge of life at large, and Art of Living?" If we probe below the surface we find that Stevenson's view is at bottom the wise old Greek view, that the end of business is leisure. For what he desires is not really idleness, but occupation congenial to his own nature. In this respect his life was all of a piece. No one, he tells us, more perseveringly played truant in boyhood and youth. But he did it, not in order to be unoccupied, but that he might be congenially busy.

It would be hard to conceive a man with the tastes of Stevenson and trained as Stevenson trained himself, who was not also a critic. Stevenson was a most accomplished one. In his letters as well as his essays we see the result of a life of thought about the principles of composition. As a critic, he is at once philosophical and intensely personal. He is at his best in papers like *A Gossip on Romance*, where the method is easy, informal and personal, and the principles are rather suggested than specifically stated; but from time to time he brings to the front one or other of the two convictions which underlie all his work—the conviction that truth of art is not identical with truth of fact, and the conviction that the first

of all duties and the greatest of all difficulties to the artist is to learn how to select. The former conviction set him in steadfast opposition to the realistic school and made him a romancer, the latter caused him to labour at shortening his books far more strenuously than others toil to spin them out. The former supplied him with a principle of division which served him in good stead many a time—as for example in his criticism of *Victor Hugo's Romances*: "If Shakespeare makes his ships cast anchor by some seaport of Bohemia, if Hugo imagines Tom-Tim-Jack to be a likely nickname for an English sailor, or if either Shakespeare, or Hugo, or Scott, for that matter, be guilty of 'figments enough to confuse the march of a whole history—anachronisms enough to overset all chronology,' the life of their creations, the artistic truth and accuracy of their work, is not so much as compromised. But when we come upon a passage like the sinking of the 'Ourque' in this romance,[1] we can do nothing but cover our face with our hands: the conscientious reader feels a sort of disgrace in the very reading. For such artistic falsehoods, springing from what I have called already an unprincipled avidity after effect, no amount of blame can be exaggerated; and above all, when the criminal is such a man as Victor Hugo."

With regard to the second conviction, his reward for the labour it entailed upon him is that his writings are among the least ephemeral of the time in which they were produced.

Of the essayists in the looser sense who still remain to be noticed the eldest was Sir Arthur Helps (1813-1875), whose *Friends in Council* seems arid enough to most readers now. The subjects dealt with are such as demand either the weight of a Bacon or the delicacy of a Lamb, and Helps had neither the one nor the other. Yet some of the greatest men of his time believed in him and praised him highly. Hawthorne, however, seems to have gauged him accurately. "A thin,

[1] *Les Travailleurs de la Mer.*

scholarly, cold sort of a man," he calls Helps; and thinnes
and coldness are exactly the words to indicate the defects o
the essays. Next to Helps in age were Charles Kingsley
(1819-1875) and John Ruskin (1819-1900); of whom the
smaller man was the greater in this particular sphere. Not
that Kingsley is wholly satisfactory as an essayist, any more
than he is in any other of his manifold activities. Andrew
Lang justly says of him that, like R. L. Stevenson, he was
always at heart a boy; and the inference which he draws, that
no one who has read him after the age of 16 can be a fair critic
of him, is also sound. But it must not be applied to Steven-
son. There is a subtle difference in the boyishness which
makes it quite possible for the man of sixty to appreciate
Stevenson, while he will be only tolerant of Kingsley. As
essayist, Kingsley's merits are, in the critical essays, vigour,
rapidity and decision, in the descriptive essays, the combina-
tion of the heart of a poet with the high spirits of a sportsman.
He is seen at his best in *Chalk Stream Studies*. The description
of the climb to the mountain lake to fish is as fresh as the
mountain breeze itself: "The pleasure lies not in the prize
itself, but in the pains which it has cost; in the upward
climb through the dark plantations, beside the rock-walled
stream; the tramp over the upland pastures, one gay flower-
bed of purple butter-wort; the steady breathless climb up the
crags, which looked but one mile from where you started, so
clear against the sky stood out every knoll and slab; the first
tars of the white saxifrage, golden-eyed, blood-bedropt, as if a
airy had pricked her finger in the cup, which shine upon some
reen cushion of wet moss, in a dripping crack of the cliff; the
st gray tufts of the Alpine club-moss, the first shrub of cran-
ry, or sea-green rose-root, with its strange fleshy stems and
ves, which mark the two-thousand-feet line, and the begin-
g of the Alpine world." If Kingsley had often reached or
remained upon this level, his place would have been a

high one. But the *Prose Idylls*, from which the passage is taken, are like everything else that Kingsley has written, only half satisfactory; and, unfortunately for the author, few men of the present age have read them before they were sixteen.

With Ruskin the fault seems to be precisely the opposite. If Kingsley remained too young, Ruskin as essayist was from the first too old. If all he has written, more or less of the essay nature, could be accepted as genuine essays, his place must be a very high one. Many of his smaller volumes are groups of essays, or of lectures, or of letters which might prove to be essays—*Unto this Last*, *Munera Pulveris*, *A Joy for Ever*, *Sesame and Lilies*, *Time and Tide*. But there was something in Ruskin's nature that did not fit in with the essay form. Not one of the volumes above named gives the impression of the essay even to the degree that essayists in the looser sense, such as Carlyle and Macaulay, give it. The reason seems to be that, instead of merging the letter in the essay, as Howell does, or the lecture in the essay, as Hazlitt does, Ruskin merges both letter and essay in lecture. He is invariably the master, and the reader must be content to be disciple. But this is utterly foreign to the spirit of the essay. The typical essayist treats the reader as a friend; even the stately essayist, Bacon, for example, allows him to see thought in process of formulation. Unless he is blessed with a singularly good conceit of himself, the reader is aware of his inferiority and voluntarily accepts the position of pupil; but he is not thrust into it. By Ruskin he is thrust into it. Ruskin lays down the law, and it is as absolute as the law of the Medes and Persians. The reader has no more freedom to dissent, or even to share in the pleasures of discovery, than the child who repeats the answers already provided in the Catechism. Of all values, including the value of what he has himself written, Ruskin is judge, and there is no appeal. The preface to the second edition of *Unto this Last* contains an instructive note, in which the author

declares that volume to be "the most precious, in its essential contents, of all that I have ever written;" and he makes this pronouncement the more impressive by calling attention to the fact that, after a certain foot-note, he prints it word for word and page for page, so as to make it as accessible as he can, to all. Its inspiration is plenary. Now this does not proceed from a silly and undiscriminating vanity: Ruskin was quite ready to condemn as unreservedly things he had formerly written but no longer believed to be true. What it does indicate is an overwhelming sense of a mission. The prophet may prophesy, and his prophesies may be divided into chapters, short and long; but none of them, whatever the length, can possibly have the characteristics of the essay.

The papers in the collection entitled *On the Old Road* are essays in the sense in which Macaulay's *Edinburgh Review* articles are essays. They are interesting and highly characteristic, and, of course, being Ruskin's, they are admirably written. Yet even they, especially the series entitled *Fiction, Fair and Foul*, are not merely dogmatic, as Macaulay also is, but pontifical. The best are those on art; and of these again the best are the delightful paper on Samuel Prout and that on Pre-Raphaelitism. Ruskin's strong expression of belief in the permanent value of Prout's work may be quoted for the sake of its resemblance to, and difference from, one of the most famous sentences of Macaulay: "His works will be cherished with a melancholy gratitude when the pillars of Venice shall lie mouldering in the salt shallows of her sea, and the stones of the goodly towers of Rouen have become ballast for the barges of the Seine." Set this beside the celebrated New Zealander on the broken arch of London Bridge, study the difference in cadence and effect, and the means whereby the difference is produced, and the secret of two styles is in great part revealed.

Perhaps Ruskin's disciple, (Walter Pater) (1839–1894), may

most conveniently be noticed immediately after his master, though chronologically he is of somewhat later date. His chief contributions to the essay are to be found in his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) and his *Appreciations* (1889). These essays are critical—critical of art as well as of literature—and, essentially, Pater belongs to the history of criticism. Nor did he often move beyond the bounds, as his master did, to criticise society. One of his characteristics indeed is a sense of the hopelessness of any such attempt. He did not share Ruskin's confidence; and while Ruskin, on the verge of fifty, was in *Time and Tide* criticising the social ideals of others and proposing to substitute for them a new ideal of his own, Pater, not yet thirty, was penning that remarkable revelation of self, the conclusion of *The Renaissance* :—

"While all melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend. Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the very brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening. With this sense of the splendour of our experience and of its awful brevity, gathering all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch, we shall hardly have time to make theories about the things we see and touch. What we have to do is to be for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions, never acquiescing in a facile orthodoxy of Comte, or of Hegel, or of our own. . . . The theory or idea or system which requires of us the sacrifice of any part of this experience, in consideration of some interest into which we cannot enter, or some abstract theory we have not identified with ourselves, or of what is only conventional, has no real claim upon us.

. . . We are all *condamnés*, as Victor Hugo says: we are all under sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite reprieve —*les hommes sont tous condamnés à mort avec des sursis indéfinis*: we have an interval, and then our place knows us no more. Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among 'the children of this world,' in art and song."

Was anything more self-centred—which means anything more decadent—ever written? No wonder that the next stage in evolution produced Oscar Wilde. A wiser and a deeper philosophy than Pater's—the philosophy of Greece as well as that of Judæa—teaches that man cannot be man without society, and that society involves giving as well as taking. In Pater, everything has to be identified with ourselves. This is the secret of the oppressiveness of Pater's atmosphere. The high-wrought English is indeed beautiful; but the beauty is artificial, and the sense it leaves is not a sense of happiness.

In direct contrast to Ruskin, Matthew Arnold (1822–1888) tended to mould all his prose material into the form of essays. The letters in *Friendship's Garland* are essays, the lectures *On Translating Homer* and the *Discourses in America* are essays too. Yet Arnold as well as Ruskin was conscious of a mission and was through life a preacher. But Arnold's method was ironic. Frequently he confesses his own inferiority; he is humble before "the young lions of the *Daily Telegraph*," and kisses the rod when he is chastised for the want of principles "coherent, interdependent, subordinate and derivative." It is possible that the wielder of the rod was not altogether happy after the submission.

Though Arnold was only three years younger than Ruskin, it was nearly twenty years after Ruskin that he became a force in the prose literature of the country. In the main, his verse belongs to the former and his prose to the latter part of

his career. Except for prefaces to his poems he published no prose until 1859, and it was not till the sixties that he became an active contributor to periodicals. The admirable essays of the first series of *Essays in Criticism* had all, except the preface and the paper on *The Literary Influence of Academies*, appeared during the years 1863 and 1864. The lectures *On Translating Homer* had preceded them in 1861. These essays and lectures made Arnold the most influential of contemporary literary critics and, by the many *dicta* not strictly limited to literature, in no small measure moulded the minds of the young men of the time. *The Study of Celtic Literature* followed, and then came *Culture and Anarchy*. The former, for good or for evil, has been the parent of a whole school of criticism. All these volumes were critical, and the criticism was mainly literary; but alongside of the literary criticism there ran a vein of social criticism, and *Culture and Anarchy* is described as "an essay in social and political criticism." *Friendship's Garland*, though more ironical, is of similar character. But before the letters which make up *Friendship's Garland* had been collected, Arnold's criticism had taken yet another turn. *St. Paul and Protestantism* was the first of the volumes in which he took the character of critic of popular conceptions of religion; and it was followed by *Literature and Dogma* and *God and the Bible*. *Mixed Essays*, *Irish Essays* and *Discourses in America* were the product of Arnold's later years.

Arnold then is a critic in a triple sense—a critic of literature, a critic of society, a critic of religion. It is unnecessary here to do more than allude to his services in the sphere of literary criticism—his insistence on the imperative need of disinterestedness; the lesson of urbanity which he taught by example as well as by precept; his condemnation of the spirit of provinciality. But it is desirable to note that there is much besides purely literary criticism in the literary essays, and

that once and again they bear witness to the fact that Arnold possessed in a rare degree the special qualities of the essayist. His picture, in the essay on Wordsworth, of the speaker at a Social Science Congress reading from a manuscript written within and without, and producing in the heart of the poor child of nature lamentation and mourning and woe, illustrates his manner. The delightful preface to the *Essays in Criticism* again and again reveals the man himself. The principle, "to try and approach truth from one side after another," was his guide through life and in all departments of his work. He expounds it again many years after in the speech to the Eton boys on the significance of *eutrapelia*, and the varying estimation in which the word has been held. There is a touch of sadness in the confession that "the world will soon be the Philistines'." There is playful sarcasm in the shyness he avows of assuming the honourable style of Professor. Arnold's sarcasm is all-pervading: it is present even in the nobly eloquent apostrophe to Oxford—"there are our young barbarians—all at play!" But it is perhaps the most good-natured sarcasm that ever was so effective. There is humour too in the consolation addressed to the travellers on the Woodford Branch, when they were agitated by a murder committed on a neighbouring railway: "Myself a transcendentalist (as the *Saturday Review* knows), I escaped the infection; and, day after day, I used to ply my agitated fellow-travellers with all the consolations which my transcendentalism would naturally suggest to me. I reminded them how Cæsar refused to take precautions against assassination, because life was not worth having at the price of an ignoble solicitude for it. I reminded them what insignificant atoms we all are in the life of the world. 'Suppose the worst to happen,' I said, addressing a portly jeweller from Cheapside; 'suppose even yourself to be the victim; *il n'y a pas d'homme nécessaire.* We should miss you for a day or

two on the Woodford Branch; but the great mundane movement would still go on, the gravel walks of your villa would still be rolled, dividends would still be paid at the Bank, omnibuses would still run, there would still be the old crush at the corner of Fenchurch Street.'"

The essays on religion have lost part of their importance by lapse of time, though the objection which was taken against them by professional theologians has less weight than the objectors imagined. It is true that Arnold was no Hebraist; but then, for the work attempted in *St. Paul and Protestantism* and in *Literature and Dogma*, a knowledge of Hebrew was of no great importance. It is even possible that such knowledge would have been a hindrance rather than a help. Arnold quoted with approval the Duke of Wellington's saying that a certain person was too highly educated for his intellect, and feared that he himself, though he knew nothing but literature, and only a portion of that, might have read too much to retain the perfect flexibility of mind which was indispensable. But however that may be, the popular mind as well as the professional mind has moved far within the last forty years. In part Arnold's essays have been built into the fabric of thought, in part the questions he deals with have become obsolete.

To a certain extent the same is true of the essays in social criticism; but, in the main, when we read these we are impressed with the sense that the same problems are before us still. As we have already seen, that is true even if we go farther back than Arnold, to Carlyle. So when, in *Ecce, convertimur in Gentes*, Arnold insisted upon three things that were necessary—"a reduction of those immense inequalities of condition and property amongst us, of which our land system is the base; a genuine municipal system; and public schools for the middle classes;" he was speaking of difficulties which have still to be faced.. Some progress has been made; but neither the municipal system nor the intermediate

schools are perfect; and least of all is the land question solved.

The core of Arnold's social doctrine is in *Culture and Anarchy*. Every one of the essays it contains is significant, and still worth studying. Yet it seemed hopelessly unpractical to preach culture as a cure for such evils as force themselves upon us in our slums. England is practical, and cries out for practical men. "But," retorts Arnold, "what if rough and coarse action, ill-calculated action, action without sufficient light, is, and has for a long time been, our bane?" With a quietly sarcastic touch he pictures the result of such action in *Porro meum est Necessarium:* "If we are sometimes a little troubled by our multitude of poor men, yet we know the increase of manufactures and population to be such a salutary thing in itself, and our free-trade policy begets such an admirable movement, creating fresh centres of industry and fresh poor men here, while we were thinking about our poor men there, that we are quite dazed and borne away, and more and more industrial movement is called for, and our social progress seems to become one triumphant and enjoyable course of what is sometimes called, vulgarly, outrunning the constable." This from a Liberal, in the days when the Manchester School was in its glory!

Other sarcasms abound, for it was Arnold's way to point out, unmistakably though with all urbanity, the defects of the people he was addressing. When he went to America one of the subjects he chose was *Numbers: or, The Majority and the Remnant;* and in treating it he pointed out to a people inordinately proud of their unprecedented growth in numbers and in material prosperity, that in the opinion of Plato the majority in Athens, and in the opinion of Isaiah the majority in Israel, had been unsound. In *Culture and Anarchy* he is addressing England; and he does not spare her. "The Dissidence of Dissent and the Protestantism of the Protestant

religion;" "preparing ourselves by the study of modern languages . . . to fight the battle of life with the waiters in foreign hotels;" the doing into British of "the Divine Injunction, 'Be ye Perfect'" in "the sentence Sir Daniel Gooch's mother repeated to him every morning when he was a boy going to work: '*Ever remember, my dear Dan, that you should look forward to being some day manager of that concern;*'" —these are specimens of the sarcasms he flings at his fellow-countrymen. It can hardly be denied that there was, and is, occasion for them. The Gospel of Getting On is still preached; a narrow and vulgar conception of what is "practical" still underlies popular conceptions of education; the dissidence of dissent still flourishes, and still produces, though in diminished measure, the fruit Arnold saw springing from it. "I remember," he says in the preface to *Culture and Anarchy*, "I remember a Nonconformist manufacturer in a town of the Midland counties, telling me that when he first came there, some years ago, the place had no Dissenters; but he had opened an Independent chapel in it, and now Church and Dissent were pretty equally divided, with sharp contests between them. I said that this seemed a pity. 'A pity?' cried he; 'not at all! Only think of all the zeal and activity which the collision calls forth!' 'Ah, but, my dear friend,' I answered, 'only think of all the nonsense which you now hold quite firmly, which you would never have held if you had not been contradicting your adversary in it all these years.'"

We no longer boast of "our incomparable civilisation;" we admit that the evils to which Arnold pointed are real evils. Perhaps it might be worth while for the practical men, who have achieved no such brilliant success after all, to consider what the unpractical apostle of culture has to suggest by way of cure. In essence, it is "the Divine Injunction 'Be ye Perfect'" done, not into British, but into Arnoldese. It is

the pursuit of perfection, and that is the pursuit of sweetness and light. It is the assertion of self—in a sense, but not in any sense we please. The conception of freedom as a thing good in itself and indistinguishable from licence must be abandoned. "The great thing . . . is to find our *best* self, and to seek to affirm nothing but that." But this is difficult. Perfection absolute may be an ideal, but certainly it can never be attained; and the best self is not altogether easy to be discovered, still less to be effectively affirmed. On the other hand, the creation of fresh poor men here while we are thinking of our poor men there has proved to be disastrously easy. It has been the same ever since the Choice of Hercules. Pleasure dwells near at hand, and the way is smooth and easy; but the way of virtue is hard, and the gods have ordained sweat of the brow to the traveller.

Evidently Arnold had the endowment of an essayist of the most intimate sort, and it is only by reason of his choice of theme, necessitating a treatment in the main less intimate, that he has to be placed in the outer ring. The same is true of Walter Bagehot (1826–1877), whose most valuable essays are contained in *Literary Studies* and *Biographical Studies.* There is something personal in Bagehot's epigrammatic sayings. When he says of Dickens that "he describes London like a special correspondent for posterity," or when he sums up Macaulay's indifference to contemporaries in the phrase, "he regards existing men as painful pre-requisites of great-grandchildren," the man himself seems to stand revealed. His wit smacks of his own personality. The sentence, "The English now and then produce a learned creature like a thistle, prickly with all facts, and incapable of all fruit," is more than the expression of a critical opinion: it throws a flood of light upon the writer. Clearly he does not admire this "learned creature;" and if he is true to himself, in

treating subjects that demand learning, he will strip off the prickles and make sure of the fruit,—in short, he will do precisely what the author of *Lombard Street* did.

There is a philosophical basis underlying all Bagehot's work. It appears in his exposition of the reason why a constitutional statesman is a person with the powers of a first-rate man and the creed of a second-rate man; in his treatment of the three forms of art, pure, ornate and grotesque; in his explanation of Scott's eccentric and abnormal characters; in the psychology of his criticism of Sterne and Thackeray; in his division of men of genius into regular, like Plato, and irregular, like Shakespeare. This basis gives coherence to all his essays, both critical and biographical. But it is never allowed to make the treatment heavy. From ponderousness Bagehot is saved by his wit and humour. His habitual way of regarding men is humorous. His wit finds constant expression in short crisp sentences, full of verve. In the structure of sentences his style resembles Macaulay's; but the diction is more colloquial, and there is an occasional looseness of grammar against which Macaulay studiously guarded himself. No one has a happier knack than Bagehot of putting the gist of an argument into a phrase—*e.g.*, "Whiggism is not a creed, it is a character;" or his answer to the sceptics who doubt whether it is possible to deduce anything as to Shakespeare's character from his works: "Surely people do not keep a tame steam-engine to write their books." Vigorous common sense, such as this is manifest all through the essays, and every reader of Bagehot's writings on economics and on the constitution is aware that it is the soul of these as well. It is this that enables him to penetrate through mists of words and to tear away veils woven by loose thinking. It is this that makes him one of the most helpful of men towards clarity of view on any subject that he discusses.

The literary characteristics of Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895) were not dissimilar to those of Bagehot. Huxley too possessed the gifts of wit and humour. Huxley too built upon a foundation of philosophy. Huxley too had the knack of pregnant expression. His style was smoother than Bagehot's, and quite as effective. His scientific pursuits did not tend to the early development of his literary qualities; and had circumstances not made him the "gladiator-general of science" and "Darwin's bull-dog," it is quite possible that they would never have been fully developed. As it was, he found himself called upon to do this work, and in the process made himself the most consummate controversialist that has ever written English. But in spite of his great merits both as man of science and as man of letters, Huxley's writings cannot long hold the position they deservedly held in his own day. In the first place, it is of the very nature of science that the work of every efficient contributor to it tends to supersede that of his predecessor. Of *Man's Place in Nature* Huxley himself, near the close of his life, wrote that it had "achieved the fate, which is the euthanasia of a scientific work, of being inclosed among the rubble of the foundations of later knowledge, and forgotten." In the second place, there is a certain vice in controversy—and none was more fully aware of it than Huxley—which in no long time empties of interest even the most skilful of controversial writings. "If I may judge by my own taste," writes Huxley, "few literary dishes are less appetising than cold controversy." And again: "Of polemical writing, as of other kinds of warfare, I think it may be said, that it is often useful, sometimes necessary, and always more or less an evil." In Huxley's case it was perhaps necessary, and certainly both useful and in some degree an evil. He took to it with the delight which the "bonny fechter" takes in the play of his sword; and his controversies with Gladstone about Genesis and about the Gadarene swine will always

remain an intellectual delight to every man whose eye is quick enough to follow the thrusts. But still, the stress of battle has shifted to other parts of the field, and it cannot be said that these papers are now of high intrinsic importance. Nevertheless, even in the most controversial writings there are passages which reveal the great soul of Huxley, and set it in a light astonishing enough to those who know him only superficially. He is, or was, popularly supposed to be an enemy of the Bible, because he could not believe the legends of the deluge and the creation; yet he was the author of one of the strongest pleas for the study of the Bible: "Throughout the history of the western world, the Scriptures, Jewish and Christian, have been the great instigators of revolt against the worst forms of clerical and political despotism. The Bible has been the *Magna Charta* of the poor and of the oppressed; down to modern times, no State has had a constitution in which the interests of the people are so largely taken into account, in which the duties, so much more than the privileges, of rulers are insisted upon, as that drawn up for Israel in Deuteronomy and Leviticus; nowhere is the fundamental truth that the welfare of the State, in the long run, depends on the uprightness of the citizen so strongly laid down. Assuredly, the Bible talks no trash about the rights of man; but it insists on the equality of duties, on the liberty to bring about that righteousness which is somewhat different from the struggle for 'rights'; on the fraternity of taking thought for one's neighbour as for one's self." Some of Huxley's most telling strokes at those whose interpretation of the Bible he challenged are drawn from the armoury of the Bible itself, and are delivered in a manner which demonstrates his profound admiration of it. Speaking of "the great saying of Micah"—"And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"—he asks: "What extent of knowledge, what acuteness of

scientific insight, can touch this, if any one possessed of knowledge, or acuteness, could be absurd enough to make the attempt? Will the progress of research prove that justice is worthless and mercy hateful; will it ever soften the bitter contrast between our actions and our aspirations; or show us the bounds of the universe, and bid us say, Go to, now we comprehend the infinite? A faculty of wrath lay in those ancient Israelites, and surely the prophet's staff would have made swift acquaintance with the head of the scholar who had asked Micah whether, peradventure, the Lord further required of him an implicit belief in the cosmogony of Genesis!" And peradventure, if the prophet had been reincarnated a millennium or two later, his staff would have made equally swift acquaintance with the head of the scholar who had asked whether the Lord required implicit belief in apostolical succession likewise.

In some of the essayists who came into prominence rather later than those who have just been discussed, there is a predominance of literary criticism which in the main excludes them from treatment here. This is especially true of Walter Theodore Watts-Dunton (1832–1914), who was unsurpassed and probably unequalled in his own generation as a literary pioneer, but whose multifarious interests outside literature are revealed rather in his poems and in his prose romance *Aylwin* than in his essays. In less degree it is true also of Leslie Stephen (1832–1904), the editor of the earlier volumes of the great *Dictionary of National Biography*. As essayist Stephen is best known for his sound and sane criticisms and his excellent biographical sketches. But he wrote also a few essays of a more personal sort. The intense emotion of *An Agnostic's Apology* is due to the quasi-persecution to which the holders of unpopular opinions are even now exposed. While it reveals Stephen in his gravest mood, *The Playground of Europe* (1871) shows him bent on holiday. These pleasant

sketches, from the essays on the old and the new schools of mountaineers to the concluding *Regrets of a Mountaineer* and *Dangers of Mountaineering*, give evidence that the man of letters was a very sincere and not merely a conventional lover of nature; and here and there a descriptive passage rises to an eloquence as unquestionable as that of Ruskin, though less ornate. Like Stephen, Henry Duff Traill (1842–1900) mingled criticism with things more personal. His essays in the volume entitled *The New Fiction* (1897), his fables and fantasies in *Number Twenty* (1892), and his skits in *The Israelitish Question* (1876) prove that he possessed a literary gift which might have won him a permanent place in literature had not so much of his energy been absorbed in work of an ephemeral character.

All these were men of books, and they must go to the Alps, or to the gypsies, in order to get rid of the atmosphere of books. But Richard Jefferies (1848–1887) was a man of the country whom adverse fate made a journalist. His atmosphere was the open air, and he carried it with him to the study and the newspaper-office. It was soon recognised that his work had in it a principle of life more lasting than that of the mere journal, and as early as 1873 his name began to appear on volumes. It was, however, through *The Gamekeeper at Home* (1878), a collection of essays reprinted from *The Pall Mall Gazette*, that he first became widely known. In the following year appeared *Wild Life in a Southern County* and *The Amateur Poacher*. Then came a rapid succession of works down to the time of the author's death, and finally an aftermath of several posthumous volumes, including *Field and Hedgerow* (1889). Thus, during his short career of barely ten years (reckoning from *The Gamekeeper at Home*), Jefferies was a very prolific writer. He was also a fairly varied one; for we find in him not only the vein of simple observation of nature, for which he is best known, but also that of poetry or

mysticism—however it may be described—which, though in the main a development of his later years, was evidently present in his heart from the beginning. It was fully expressed in *Wood Magic*, which appeared only three years after *The Gamekeeper at Home*. He paints "a dreamy, slumberous place, where the sedges slept, and the green flags bowed their painted heads. Under the bushes in the distant nook the moorhen, reassured by the silence, came out from the grey-green grass and the rushes. Surely Calypso's cave could not be far distant, where she with

> work and song the time divides
> And through the loom the golden shuttle guides.

For the Immortals are hiding somewhere still in the woods; even now I do not weary searching for them." This is beautiful; but it is a sort of beauty of which prose is susceptible only now and then, and which seems more appropriate in romance or in autobiography, as in *The Story of my Heart*, than as the staple of the essay.

In Jefferies as essayist it is another phase which is most prominent. He is the observer, chronicling patiently, minutely, and, as experts declare, with absolute fidelity the facts of nature. But it seems legitimate to doubt whether this part of Jefferies's work will long be read. No doubt he akes us, as Lowell said of White of Selborne, into the open ir; and no doubt that is a service, and one which has long ept White's memory green. But there is a something in hite that is not to be found in Jefferies. Bare facts are not ence, nor yet are they literature, and in far too many sages Jefferies gives mere catalogues of things he has seen. netimes he saves himself by interweaving a human interest his observation of nature; not so much in *Hodge and his ter*, where perhaps his observations as critic of society are npressive than his observations as naturalist, but rat

The Amateur Poacher, where the human element is drawn from his own boyish experiences. The boys with their love of sport, their experiments with the old flint-lock in the garret, the ruthless burning of it, the single-barrel with reduced charge that killed the wood-pigeon—these are things which give infinitely more interest than any but the naturalist can easily take in the mere catalogue of *Wild Life in a Southern Country*. No doubt it is accurate observation; but what other value does it possess? A comparison of such a passage as the following (one of many) with *Our Village*, shows how greatly the literary value of this part of the work of Jefferies has been exaggerated:—

"Such places, close to cultivated land yet undisturbed, are the best in which to look for wild flowers; and on the narrow strip beside the hedge and on the crumbling rubble bank of the rough track may be found a greater variety than by searching the broad acres beyond. In the season the large white bell-like flowers of the convolvulus will climb over the hawthorn, and the lesser striped kind will creep along the ground. The pink pimpernel hides on the very verge of the corn, which presently will be strewn with the beautiful 'bluebottle' flower, than whose exquisite hue there is nothing more lovely in our fields. The great scarlet poppy with the black centre, and 'eggs and butter'—curious name for a flower—will, of course, be there: the latter often flourishes on a high elevation, on the very ridges, provided only the plough has been there."

"He was a reporter of genius; and he never got beyond reporting," is the judgment of Henley in a notice which, if it errs, does not err on the side of severity. The justification of the judgment appears in a hundred passages such as that above quoted.

CHAPTER XII

SOME ESSAYISTS OF YESTERDAY

There remain a few essayists who seem to stand closer to our own time than those who have just been reviewed. Yet in some cases the closer proximity is apparent rather than real. Andrew Lang was born before R. L. Stevenson and Lafcadio Hearn in the same year with him; while George Gissing and Francis Thompson belong to the same decade. It was, however, later before they made their mark in literature, and later before they made their exit from it.

Andrew Lang (1844–1912) was a man who seemed to have all the qualities necessary to make a great essayist. The wider his knowledge the less likely is the essayist to exhaust himself; and few have surpassed Lang in width of information. He was a classical scholar, he had read extensively in history and in literature, he was at home in anthropology, he could discuss ghosts and the occult. He was, moreover, a sportsman, and was familiar with life in the open air as well as in the library. In all his many fields of intellectual activity he was surpassed in knowledge, it may be, by a few, but only by a few. Two or three had read more widely, two or three had penetrated more deeply into the by-ways of Scottish history. But the specialists who occasionally corrected him could rarely make effective use of their superior knowledge. And, after all, if their knowledge was superior at one point it was in most cases incomparably inferior on the whole. Lang had what they mostly lacked—an easy and graceful style. Never, perhaps, did he show it to greater advantage

than in the latest work of his pen, the *History of English Literature*. To have condensed the story of that literature into a single moderate volume, and to have done this in such a way that every page is bright and readable, is an extraordinary triumph. This volume proves further that Lang had the gift of humour, which also is so valuable to the essayist. And there is evidence everywhere that he did not object, but rather loved, to impart personal confidences. His reader is never left long in doubt as to his love of Scott and the Scott country, which was also his country, or as to his interest in apparitions. In short, it would seem that Lang had the essayist's endowments in their full range. And yet it has to be confessed that as essayist he is disappointing. Varied as are the themes and pleasant as is the style, there is always just something lacking to complete success. Whatever volume we take up, whether *Essays in Little*, or *Angling Sketches*, or *Lost Leaders*, or *Letters to Dead Authors*, the impression left is agreeable, but not deep. They are not the sort of literature that lives, and each in its own way has been surpassed by men of gifts apparently inferior to Lang's. Part of the reason, no doubt, was that he did too much. The essays are the by-product of a mind that was constantly busy with other things. They are journalistic rather than literary. It may be that even Lamb's would have been so too, if he had been as incessantly engaged upon larger works.

The three younger men who have been named along with Lang were all essayists of a higher class than he. The eldest of them, Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904), stands by himself, one of the most remarkable, but in some ways by no means among the most attractive, figures in recent literature, an example perhaps unique of the intermingling of the lofty with the sordid, the ethereal with the grossly mundane. He who makes his entrance into literature as the writer of a most repulsive report of a murder case is yet the author of one of

the noblest moral tales in the language—*Karma;* and the disciple of Herbert Spencer is the interpreter to England of the spirit of old Japan. Upon the value of this last phase of his work Hearn's position in literature, and especially among the essayists, will finally depend. His early journalistic work in America, so far as it can be judged from the fragments accessible, is better forgotten. Much of it seems to have been unwholesome in the extreme. The writings which were the outcome of his stay in the West Indies are greatly superior. *Two Years in the French West Indies* is a collection of sketches of life in Martinique in which Hearn proves himself to be a rarely-gifted impressionist. And this was the part he was destined for. Like the film of the photographer, his mind absorbed whatever was presented to it; but it could rarely react upon its materials without spoiling them. Hence Hearn's earliest writings on Japan are the best. Nothing that he afterwards wrote quite equalled *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan,* where he simply allowed novel scenes and strange customs to play upon his mind, and reproduced in words their effect upon himself. In the art of doing this Hearn is unsurpassed. There are fine things in the later volumes as well, from *Out of the East* to *Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation,* in the latter of which he attempted to sum up all that he had learnt from the East. But in all there is greater self-consciousness than in the first volume; and with Hearn self-consciousness means weakness. The very fact that he held the Spencerian philosophy along with so much that is irreconcilable with it is a proof that he had no capacity for systematic thinking. The character of his style, with its suggestion of dim vistas and vaguely-alluring colour, leads to the same conclusion. The fact that, though he lived for many years in Japan and married a Japanese wife, he never learnt the Japanese language, is itself sufficient proof that, though we may go to him for impressions, it would

be dangerous to trust his reasoned conclusions beyond the point where we see them guaranteed by impressions.

An interesting feature of the recent intellectual history of England is the rise of the provincial universities, and George Gissing (1857–1903) and Francis Thompson (1859–1907) illustrate it; for both were alumni of the Owen's College, which has since developed into the University of Manchester.

Both were men of tragical lives, and both were exquisite writers. It is true we think of Thompson primarily as a poet and of Gissing as a novelist. In Thompson's case the view is right, but in Gissing's it is very questionable, and, if wrong, is most unjust to Gissing. Good as his novels are, they are certainly not of a quality to secure him a place in the first rank. But those who know Gissing's work well, know, from his admirable monograph on Dickens, that he was also a critic of rare insight; and above all they know, (from his *Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, that he was one of the foremost of recent essayists.) *Henry Ryecroft* is fiction of a sort. But it is not a novel, for it has neither plot nor, properly speaking, story, and only one character, unless we count the housekeeper as a second. Neither has it any unity, except that which the personality of Ryecroft, who in essentials is Gissing himself, imparts. Probably Gissing began with some more or less definite idea of making the book a unity. He hints as much in the preface, where he speaks of the papers of the imaginary Ryecroft: "I suspect that, in his happy leisure, there grew upon him a desire to write one more book, a book which should be written merely for his own satisfaction. Plainly, it would have been the best he had it in him to do. But he seems never to have attempted the arrangement of these fragmentary pieces, and probably because he could not decide upon the form they should take. I imagine him shrinking from the thought of a first-person volume; he would feel it too pretentious; he would bid himself wait for

the day of riper wisdom. And so the pen fell from his hand."

And so, instead of an unreal unity, we have in this volume one of the most fascinating collections of "dispersed meditations" in the language; one of the most pathetic too, when we contrast Gissing's anxious and frustrated life in 'New Grub Street,' with the delicate sensitiveness here revealed to the beauty of sky and field and flower. Alone of all his books *Henry Ryecroft* was written "for his own satisfaction"; and it is so greatly superior to anything else he has written that we are tempted to speculate as to what has been lost through the untoward circumstances which denied him the liberty to write always for his own satisfaction. He himself asks what would have been the result upon him if he had achieved success early, and he answers, Nothing but good. We may accept the answer. The world would have been richer, had it made Gissing richer. *Henry Ryecroft* gives Gissing a place among that group of essayists of whom Lamb is chief, a place higher than that of any recent writer except Stevenson. He who knew so well the value of time, and who has written about it with unsurpassed wisdom, was condemned to write for money, and to write what was not his best because his mind was not in tune. "Time is money—says the vulgarest saw known to any age or people. Turn it round about, and you get a precious truth—money is time. I think of it on these dark, mist-blinded mornings, as I come down to find a glorious fire crackling and leaping in my study. Suppose I were so poor that I could not afford that heartsome blaze, how different the whole day would be! Have I not lost many and many a day of my life for lack of the material comfort which was necessary to *put my mind in tune?* Money is time. With money I buy for cheerful use the hours which otherwise would not in any sense be mine; nay, which would make me their miserable bondsman. Money is time, and, heaven be thanked, there needs so little of it for this sort of

purchase. He who has overmuch is wont to be as badly off in regard to the true use of money, as he who has not enough. What are we doing all our lives but purchasing, or trying to purchase, time? And most of us having grasped it with one hand, throw it away with the other."

The range of *Henry Ryecroft* is very wide. Its subject is, not whatever men do, but whatever a singularly rich and thoughtful mind broods over. Nature, books, art, science, politics, the English Sunday, the ultimate problems of life and death, morals, stoicism, all are touched upon, all are more or less fully discussed. There are lighter things as well—sea-coal fires, tea, English cookery—discussed with a wholesome insular prejudice; for, though Gissing abhorred Jingoism, and looked upon the possible coming of conscription "with the sickness of dread and of disgust," he was genuinely and deeply patriotic. But perhaps the most wonderful feature of the book is the evidence it affords of a capacity for deep joy in the country on the part of this denizen of the city. His descriptions are always beautiful, and sometimes highly poetical. Winter is "Nature's annual slumber," and sunshine at that season is "the soft beam which is Nature's smile in dreaming." Here is his praise of silence:—

"Every morning when I awake, I thank heaven for silence. This is my orison. I remember the London days when sleep was broken by clash and clang, by roar and shriek, and when my first sense on returning to consciousness was hatred of the life about me. Noises of wood and metal, clattering of wheels, banging of implements, jangling of bells—all such things are bad enough, but worse still is the clamorous human voice. Nothing on earth is more irritating to me than a bellow or scream of idiot mirth, nothing more hateful than a shout or yell of brutal anger. Were it possible, I would never again hear the utterance of a human tongue, save from those few who are dear to me.

"Here, wake at what hour I may, early or late, I lie amid gracious stillness. Perchance a horse's hoof rings rhythmically upon the road; perhaps a dog barks from a neighbouring farm; it may be that there comes the far, soft murmur of a train from the other side of Exe; but these are almost the only sounds that could force themselves upon my ear. A voice, at any time of the day, is the rarest thing.

"But there is the rustle of branches in the morning breeze; there is the music of a sunny shower against the window; there is the matin song of birds. Several times lately I have lain wakeful when there sounded the first note of the earliest lark; it makes me almost glad of my restless nights. The only trouble that touches me in these moments is the thought of my long life wasted amid the senseless noises of man's world. Year after year this spot has known the same tranquillity; with ever so little of good fortune, with ever so little wisdom, beyond what was granted me, I might have blessed my manhood with calm, might have made for myself in later life a long retrospect of bowered peace. As it is, I enjoy with something of sadness, remembering that this melodious silence is but the prelude of that deeper stillness which waits to enfold us all."

Of a man of this temperment we learn without surprise that every instinct of his being is anti-democratic; that he dreads "to think of what our England may become when Demos rules irresistibly;" that, to him, "democracy is full of menace to all the finer hopes of civilisation;" that though there has been a day when he called himself a socialist, he is in reality in every fibre an individualist. So, surely, must the artist always be. Gissing's is no bad definition of art: "An expression, satisfying and abiding, of the zest of life." But each man must feel the zest himself, or for him it does not exist. And great part of the charm of *Henry Ryecroft* is due to the fact that it is a revelation of the temperament of an

artist. There are confidences as intimate and almost as delightful as those of Lamb. The story of the purchase of Heyne's *Tibullus* and the quarto Gibbon is not unworthy to set beside the essay on *Old China*. The essay in which Gissing describes the effect upon *him* of the room hung with prints after English landscape painters, where as a child he used to sleep, has not indeed all the charm of *Blakesmoor in H——shire*, but it belongs to the same order of writings. With *The Superannuated Man* there is not resemblance, but contrast. Lamb represents himself as stunned and overwhelmed by his liberation. He misses his old chains, and has to go back and visit his old desk-fellows. Ryecroft's freedom contrasts with a harder and more grinding slavery than Lamb's had ever been. He chuckles over the sympathy offered to him in his supposed loneliness. Though the rich humour of Lamb is not to be found in Gissing, he has enriched the English language with a book which belongs to the same order as the immortal book of Elia.

If Gissing is the most charming, his fellow-collegian Thompson is the most eloquent of recent essayists. Thompson has suffered from injudicious and excessive praise, but he is great enough to survive that, as well as the depreciation it provokes. The story of his life, in which ill fortune and good are so strangely mingled (for surely it was the best of good fortune to find such friends as they who sheltered the latter part of his career), is too well known to need recounting; but it is not irrelevant to note that the ill fortune which dogged him so long is exemplified in the history of his principal prose work, the essay on Shelley, as well as in the events of his life. Written in 1889, it was sent to *The Dublin Review*, but was not published there till 1908, after the hapless poet's death; and, to heighten the irony, it was received with a burst of praise that was more than adequate to even its high merits. Full of insight and rich in striking sentences the essay certainly

is; and at the close it rises to a grand burst of eloque
Yet, like most of the poems, it leaves an impression of exc
The style is somewhat too gorgeous.

The bulk of Thompson's prose is, like the essay on Shel
critical; and much of it has that special interest which belo
to the utterances of a poet on his own art. But Thomp
was more than an occasional critic; he was an artist in pi
as well as in verse. His own example helps to establish
truth of his saying that "it might almost be erected int
rule that a great poet is, if he please, also a master of pro
His own prose, always distinguished, though never free fr
faults, rises in a small group of essays nearly to the high
excellence. The faults might even, on a theory of his o
be regarded as the last touch that made the style supre
That remarkable essay, *The Way of Imperfection*, shows h
paradox may be made not merely to titillate the mind, bu
reveal truth. Thompson gives expression to the fear t
"unless some voice be raised in timely protest . . . Eng
art (in its widest sense) must soon dwindle to the extinc
of unendurable excellence." Spoken by Oscar Wilde,
would probably have been merely a scintillation of wit d
as soon as born. To the graver and deeper mind of Thom
it has a profound meaning, and he wins his reader's as
to its truth: "This pure white light of style [*i*.e. style enti
free from mannerism] is as impossible as undesirable.
must be splintered into colour by the refracting media of
individual mind, and humanity will always prefer the co
Theoretically we ought to have no mannerisms; prac
we cannot help having them, and without them style v
flavourless—faultily faultless, icily regular, splendid
This is not only true, but it is a truth which ha
application than Thompson was here concerned
It holds of the substance of thought as well as of t
its expression. The historian free from prejudice

stylist free from mannerism—at once impossible and undesirable. If the end were attained he would be unreadable.

But there are other things besides literary criticism in Thompson's essays. *In Darkest England* is a piece of social criticism suggested by General Booth's celebrated scheme. It is highly characteristic of Thompson, for it throbs with sensibility to the evils which he, partly by experience and partly by his poet's power of divination, knew hardly less well than General Booth himself. The contrast between the two aspects of England is at once just and beautiful and tragic:—

"I see upon my right hand a land of lanes, and hedgerows, and meadowed green; whose people's casual tread is over blossoming yellow, white and purple, far-shining as the constellations that sand their nightly heaven; where the very winter rains, into which the deciduous foliage rots, cover the naked boughs with a vividness of dusted emerald.

"I look upon my left hand, and I see another region—is it not rather another universe? A region whose hedgerows have set to brick, whose soil is chilled to stone; where flowers are sold and women, where the men wither and the stars; whose streets to me on the most glittering day are black. For I unveil their secret meanings. *I read their human hieroglyphs.* I diagnose from a hundred occult signs the disease which perturbs their populous pulses. Misery cries out to me from the kerb-stone, despair passes me by in the ways; I discern limbs laden with fetters impalpable, but not imponderable; I hear the shaking of invisible lashes, I see men dabbled with their own oozing life. This contrast rises before me; and I ask myself whether there be indeed an Ormuzd and an Ahriman, and whether Ahriman be the stronger of the twain. From the claws of the sphinx my eyes have risen to her countenance which no eyes read."

There are other essays no less characteristic in other ways; among them *Mæstitiæ Encomium*, so redolent of De Quincey,

unless it be that both are redolent of opium. The subject is one on which both write beautifully, and with a wisdom born of pain. "I know her," says Thompson, "and praise knowing. Foolishly we shun this shunless Sadness; fondly we deem of her as but huntress of men, who is tender and the bringer of tenderness to those she visits with her fearful favours. A world without joy were more tolerable than a world without sorrow. Without sadness where were brotherliness? For in joy is no brotherliness, but only a boon-companionship. She is the Spartan sauce which gives gusto to the remainder-viands of life, the broken meats of love." "That's what all the blessed evil's for," says Browning. Probably the Catholic Thompson would have hesitated to follow Browning the whole length; yet it seems to be all in a logical concatenation.

The most intimate of all the essays, however, is that profoundly thoughtful and penetrating one entitled *Health and Holiness, A Study of the Relations between Brother Ass the Body and his Rider the Soul.* Here again we find the ascetic and mystic Thompson coming singularly near to Browning.

> "Let us not always say,
> 'Spite of this flesh to-day
> —I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!'
> As the bird wings and sings,
> Let us cry, 'All good things
> Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul!'"

Asceticism, Thompson holds, is wise and indeed necessary; but Brother Ass has rights too, and at times Brother Ass has been unmercifully ridden. Wise asceticism is that which will secure health in the deepest sense, the health of both body and soul, the health which is holiness. And such asceticism will vary with time and circumstance. "The weak, dastardly and selfish body of to-day needs an asceticism—never more,"—but it must not be the asceticism which the robuster, undegenerate body of old bore. This essay is clearly the

product of the pen which always inscribed a cross on the top of the page before it wrote the poem or the essay. More than anything else he has written in prose, it is a revelation of the soul of Thompson.

No essayist who has passed away in recent years can rival these three in importance. There have been several who have shown high gifts—for example, Hubert Bland of the *Sunday Chronicle*. But Bland provides the word which indicates his own limitation. He lacks "fundamentality," the something which makes what is written interesting not only for the time but for a later generation. Mary E. Coleridge, however (1861-1907), would deserve at least a passing notice were it only for the illustration she affords of that extraordinary power to transmit the literary faculty which the Coleridge family exhibits in a degree unrivalled by any other. She deserves notice for her own merits also. That she inherited the poetic gift her little volume of verses proves; and indeed we see it in her prose as well. In this respect, it is true, she stands immeasurably below, not merely the great poet of her name, but his son Hartley as well. But she had other gifts, less great than this, yet valuable to the essayist, in which she surpassed them. She had humour, and she had lightness of touch. These qualities are well blended in the papers *On Noises*, *More Worlds than One*, and *Travellers' Tales*.

Richard Middleton, who died recently at the age of twenty-nine, demands notice on another score. *The Day before Yesterday* is a charming volume of essays belonging to that class of books for children or about children for which the last two generations have been distinguished beyond all other periods, since that indefinite time when the fairy tales and the nursery stories of giant-killers were invented. It is the work of a man who retained the heart of childhood till his death, and whose poetic imagination kept open for him a world that closes for the great majority of "Olympians" almost b

they have become Olympian. The effect of the essays is cumulative; while all are pleasing, there is hardly one of such merit as to make it memorable in itself. But whoever reads the volume will find that he has gained an insight into the imaginative life of children such as is hardly to be obtained elsewhere. Thus Middleton's essays have a place of their own, where they have scarcely a rival, except the books of Mr. Kenneth Grahame. The point of view is the child's, to whom the Olympian is a tiresome being, who is always interfering with that which he does not understand. Even on the rare occasions when Middleton steps, as it were, outside, and takes up the position of the critic, his sympathy is with the child; as is clear from the closing sentences of the essay *On Children's Gardens*:—

"When a child has wrought a fine morning's havoc in its little patch of ground it has added it may be an ocean, it may be only a couple of stars to the kingdom of imagination which we may no longer see. It only needs a sunny hour or two, a trowel, and a pair of dirty hands to change a few square yards of earth into a world. And the child may be considered fortunate in being able to express itself in terms of dust. Our books and pictures cumber the earth, our palaces strike the skies, and yet it is our common tragedy that we have not found expression; while down the garden behind the lilac-bushes at this very moment Milton may have developed Lycidas into a sticky marsh, and Shakespeare may have compressed Hamlet into a mud-pie. The works of the children end as they begin in dust; but we cannot pretend that ours are more permanent."

That imaginative sympathy, not critical, which is the special characteristic of these essays may be illustrated from almost any of them taken at random; but it is perhaps specially marked in *The Magic Pool*, *A Repertory Theatre*, and *The Wool-Gatherer*. The last-named deals with the dreamer of mature years, who is viewed with pitying contempt by the Olympians,

but with respect by the children who live in the same dream-world and see that the wool-gatherer realises in his life that for which they themselves long. "We saw that the wool-gatherer did no recognisable work, wore comfortably untidy clothes, walked in the mud as much as he wanted to, and, in fine, lived a life of enviable freedom." *A Repertory Theatre* is comparable with Stevenson's *A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured;* and *The Magic Pool* recalls to every reader that awe of the unknown which is probably universal in childhood. It is a perfect picture, that of the two small boys on their midnight march to the pool—one little hand stealing out to the other and remaining clasped in it, one thinking that the other was breathing shortly and noisily and then finding that it was his own breathing that he heard, one pulling out his watch with a hand so unsteady that he could hardly tell the time, and finally the panic-flight just before the fateful moment.

While Middleton affords pleasant reading, he is representative of nothing in particular beyond himself; but John M. Synge (1871-1909), whether he wished it or not, was representative of a whole class and, in a sense, of a literary theory. He belongs to the Celtic group; and since Arnold wrote his *Study of Celtic Literature* we have again and again been given to understand that practically all that makes poetry poetical comes from Celtic sources. This theory is somewhat shaken by the fact that all our poets who are indubitably of the first rank have been born in England, and not on the Celtic fringe; and the conception that mysticism in particular is a peculiarly Celtic quality is hardly reconcilable with the fact that some of the greatest mystics have borne such names as Swedenborg, Von Hardenberg and Boehme. Preconceptions of this sort have led to great exaggerations with regard to most writers by whom these supposed racial qualities are believed to have been exhibited; and Synge among others has suffered from praise ill-judged and unmeasured. His papers entitled *In*

Wicklow and *In West Kerry*, as well as his dramas, have fine literary and even poetic qualities. But to claim that he is almost, if not quite, the peer of the greatest, is to show want of critical balance. What is true is that Synge was a highly gifted man, and that nearly all he has written has the authentic stamp of genius. He was delicately sensitive. He too, as well as Hearn, received impressions as surely as the photographer's plate, and he had the specially literary gift of rendering those impressions intelligible to others who themselves could receive them only imperfectly if at all. He seldom makes a description, but he does better, he gives the nearest literary equivalent to an instantaneous photograph—but that phrase is unjust to him, for the special characteristic of his papers is the something of Synge himself which they contain. Take for illustration a sentence from *In West Kerry*: "The procession along the olive bogs, between the mountains and the sea, on this grey day of autumn, seemed to wring me with the pang of emotion one meets everywhere in Ireland—an emotion that is partly local and patriotic, and partly a share of the desolation that is mixed everywhere with the supreme beauty of the world." How few and simple are the touches of description—the olive bogs, the grey day, the desolation,—and yet how surely they carry the impression he wished to convey. And then the glimpse of the poetic soul which has felt this and interpreted it for us. If we turn again to *In Wicklow*, we find in *The Oppression of the Hills* the same keen feeling for nature conveyed with the minimum of description, conveyed in a phrase or two, and with it the same sense of the companionship of a poet's soul: "Near these cottages little bands of half-naked children, filled with the excitement of evening, were running and screaming over the bogs, where the heather was purple already, giving me the strained feeling of regret one has so often in these places when there is rain in the air." In both there is manifest that sympathy with man which

is the essence of all truly poetic love of nature, is, in fact, the essence of the difference between the poet's love of nature and that of the man of science. Synge can throw a world of pathos into a phrase. No one else touches so surely as he the sadness of Ireland. *The People of the Glens* is full of pathos. He speaks of the emotions of the night, and in them his high-strung nature finds the secret of one phase of the sadness of his countrymen: "Among these emotions of the night one cannot wonder that the madhouse is so often named in Wicklow." It is one of "the three shadowy countries that are never forgotten in Wicklow—America (their El Dorado), the Union and the Madhouse." There is something cognate in Mr. Filson Young's *Ireland at the Cross-Roads*, but it would be difficult to find a parallel elsewhere.

The note is a sad one, but sorrow rather than mirth has in all ages begotten great literature. "The pencil of the Holy Ghost," says Bacon, "hath laboured more in describing the afflictions of Job than the felicities of Solomon."

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